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HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE  
BY  
H. A. TAINE, D. C. L.

IMPERIAL EDITION.

Of this edition 500 copies have been printed,  
of which this is No. <sup>273</sup>





*PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY*



IMPERIAL EDITION

HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

H. A. TAINE, D. C. L.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

H. VAN LAUN

One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

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## CONTENTS.—VOL. IV.

### PART I.

## BOOK IV.—MODERN LIFE

### CHAPTER II

#### Lord Byron.

	PAGE
I. The Man—Family—Impassioned character—Precocious loves—Life of excess—Combative character—Revolt against opinion— <i>English Bards and Scotch Reviewers</i> —Bravado and rashness—Marriage—Extravagance of adverse opinion—Departure—Political life in Italy—Sorrows and violence . . . . .	
II. The poet—Reasons for writing—Manner of writing—How his poetry is personal—Classical taste—How this gift served him— <i>Childe Harold</i> —The hero—The scenery—The style . . . . .	13
III. His short poems—Oratorical manner—Melodramatic effects—Truth of his descriptions of scenery—Sincerity of sentiments—Pictures of sad and extreme emotions—Dominant idea of death and despair— <i>Manfred</i> , <i>The Prisoner of Chillon</i> , <i>The Siege of Corinth</i> , <i>The Corsair</i> , <i>Lara</i> —Analogy of this conception with the <i>Edda</i> and Shakspeare— <i>Darkness</i> . . . . .	22

	PAGE
IV. <i>Manfred</i> —Comparison of <i>Manfred</i> and <i>Faust</i> —Conception of legend and life in Goethe—Symbolical and philosophical character of <i>Faust</i> —Wherein Byron is inferior to Goethe—Wherein he is superior—Conception of character and action in Byron—Dramatic character of his poem—Contrast between the universal and the personal poet . . . . .	34
V. Scandal in England—Constraint and hypocrisy of manners—How and by what law moral conceptions vary—Life and morals of the south— <i>Beppo</i> — <i>Don Juan</i> —Transformation of Byron's talent and style—Picture of sensuous beauty and happiness— <i>Haidée</i> —How he combats British cant—Human hypocrisy—His idea of man—Of woman— <i>Donna Julia</i> —The shipwreck—The capture of <i>Ismail</i> —Naturalness and variety of his style—Excess and wearing out of his poetic vein—His drama—Departure for Greece, and death . . . . .	47
VI. Position of Byron in his age—Disease of the age—Divine conceptions of happiness and life—The conception of such happiness by literature—By the sciences—Future stability of reason—Modern conception of nature . . . . .	65

### CHAPTER III.

#### The Past and the Present.

##### § 1.

I. The past—The Saxon invasion—How it established the race and determined the character—The Norman Conquest—How it modified the character and established the Constitution . . . . .	70
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## CONTENTS.

vii

	PAGE
II. The Renaissance—How it manifested the national mind—The Reformation—How it fixed the ideal—The Restoration—How it imported classical culture and misled the national mind—The Revolution—How it developed classical culture and restored the national mind . . . . .	73
III. The modern age—How European ideas widened the national mould . . . . .	78

### § 2.

I. The present—Concordances of observation and history—Sky—Soil—Products—Man . . . . .	81
II. Commerce—Industry . . . . .	90
III. Agriculture . . . . .	97
IV. Society—Family—Arts—Philosophy—Religion . . . . .	103
V. What forces have produced the present civilisation, and are working out the future civilisation . . . . .	110

## BOOK V.—MODERN AUTHORS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE . . . . .	113
-----------------------------	-----

### CHAPTER I.

#### *The Nobel—Dickens.*

##### § 1.—THE AUTHOR.

I. Connection of the different elements of each talent—Importance of the imaginative faculty . . . . .	117
II. Lucidity and intensity of imagination in Dickens—Boldness and vehemence of his fancy—How with him inanimate objects are personified and impassioned—Wherein his conception is akin to intuition—How he describes idiots and madmen . . . . .	118

	PAGE
III. The objects to which he directs his enthusiasm— His trivialities and minuteness—Wherein he resembles the painters of his country—Wherein he differs from George Sand— <i>Miss Ruth</i> and <i>Geneviève</i> —A journey in a coach . . .	129
IV. Vehemence of the emotions which this kind of imagination must produce—His pathos— <i>Stephen</i> , the factory hand—His humour—Why he attains to buffoonery and caricature—Recklessness and nervous exaggeration of his gaiety . . .	133

### § 2.—THE PUBLIC.

I. English novels are compelled to be moral—Wherein this constraint modifies the idea of love—Com- parison of love in George Sand and Dickens— Pictures of the young girl and the wife— Wherein this constraint qualifies the idea of passion—Comparison of passions in Balzac and Dickens—Inconvenience of this foregone conclu- sion—How comic or odious masks are substituted for natural characters—Comparison of <i>Pecksniff</i> and <i>Tartuffe</i> —Why unity of action is absent in Dickens . . . . .	142
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### § 3.—THE CHARACTERS.

I. Two classes of characters—Natural and instinctive characters—Artificial and positive characters— Preference of Dickens for the first—Aversion against the second . . . . .	150
II. The hypocrite—Mr. Pecksniff—Wherein he is Eng- lish—Comparison of <i>Pecksniff</i> and <i>Tartuffe</i> —The positive man—Mr. Gradgrind—The proud man —Mr. Dombey—Wherein these characters are English . . . . .	151

## CONTENTS.

ix

	PAGE
III. Children—Wanting in French literature—Little <i>Joas</i> and <i>David Copperfield</i> —Men of the lower orders . . . . .	159
IV. The ideal man according to Dickens—Wherein this conception corresponds to a public need—Opposition of culture and nature in England—Reassertion of sensitiveness and instinct oppressed by conventionalism and rule—Success of Dickens .	163

## CHAPTER II.

### *The Nobel continued—Thackeray.*

I. Abundance and excellence of novels of manners in England—Superiority of Dickens and Thackeray—Comparison between them . . . . .	165
§ 1.—THE SATIRIST.	
II. The satirist—His moral intentions—His moral dissertations . . . . .	166
III. Comparison of raillery in France and England—Difference of the two temperaments, tastes, and minds . . . . .	173
IV. Superiority of Thackeray in bitter and serious satire—Serious irony—Literary snobs— <i>Miss Blanche Amory</i> —Serious caricature— <i>Miss Hoggarty</i> .	176
V. Solidity and precision of this satirical conception—Resemblance of Thackeray and Swift—The duties of an ambassador . . . . .	185
VI. Misanthropy of Thackeray—Silliness of his heroines—Silliness of love—Inbred vice of human generosities and exaltations . . . . .	188
VII. His levelling tendencies—A want of characters and society in England—Aversions and preferences—The snob and the aristocrat—Portraits of the	

	king, the great court noble, the county gentleman, the town gentleman—Advantages of this aristocratic institution—Exaggeration of the satire . . . . .	PAGE 191
	§ 2.—THE ARTIST.	
VIII.	The artist—Idea of pure art—Wherein satire injures art—Wherein it diminishes the interest—Wherein it falsifies the characters—Comparison of Thackeray and Balzac— <i>Valérie Marneffe</i> and <i>Rebecca Sharp</i> . . . . .	205
IX.	Attainment of pure art—Portrait of <i>Henry Esmond</i> —Historical talent of Thackeray—Conception of ideal man . . . . .	214
X.	Literature is a definition of man—The definition according to Thackeray—Wherein it differs from the truth . . . . .	224

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

---

### Volume IV.

#### Part I.

---

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, . . . . .	Frontispiece.
THOMAS CAMPBELL, . . . . .	Page 16
ALEXANDER POPE, . . . . .	" 22
THOMAS MOORE, . . . . .	" 51
HERBERT SPENCER, . . . . .	" 75
DANIEL DEFOE, . . . . .	" 96
JOHN STUART MILL, . . . . .	" 105
CHARLES DICKENS, . . . . .	" 164





# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

## BOOK IV.

### MODERN LIFE.

#### CHAPTER II.

Lord Byron.

##### I.

I HAVE reserved for the last the greatest and most English of these literary men; he is so great and so English that from him alone we shall learn more truths of his country and of his age than from all the rest put together. His ideas were proscribed during his life; it has been attempted to depreciate his genius since his death. Even at the present day English critics are hardly just to him. He fought all his life against the society from which he was descended; and during his life, as after his death, he suffered the penalty of the resentment which he provoked, and the dislike to which he gave rise. A foreign critic may be more impartial, and freely praise the powerful hand whose blows he has not felt.

If ever there was a violent and madly sensitive soul, but incapable of shaking off its bonds; ever agitated.

VOL. IV.

B

U. V. P. L.

but yet shut in ; predisposed to poetry by its innate fire, but limited by its natural barriers to a single kind of poetry,—it was Byron's.

This promptitude to extreme emotions was with him a family legacy, and the result of education. His great-uncle, a sort of raving and misanthropical maniac, had slain in a tavern brawl, by candle-light, Mr. Chaworth, his relative, and had been tried before the House of Lords. His father, a brutal roysterer, had eloped with the wife of Lord Carmarthen, ruined and ill-treated Miss Gordon, his second wife ; and, after living like a madman and a scoundrel, had gone with the remains of his wife's family property, to die abroad. His mother, in her moments of fury, would tear her dresses and her bonnets to pieces. When her wretched husband died she almost lost her reason, and her cries were heard in the street. It would take a long story to tell what a childhood Byron passed under the care of "this lioness ;" in what torrents of insults, interspersed with softer moods, he himself lived, just as passionate and more bitter. His mother ran after him, called him a "lame brat," shouted at him, and threw fire-shovel and tongs at his head. He held his tongue, bowed, and none the less felt the outrage. One day, when he was "in one of his silent rages," they had to take out of his hand a knife which he had taken from the table, and which he was already raising to his throat. Another time the quarrel was so terrible, that son and mother, each privately, went to "the apothecary's, inquiring anxiously whether the other had been to purchase poison, and cautioning the vendor of drugs not to attend to such an application, if made."<sup>1</sup> When he went to school, "his

<sup>1</sup> *Byron's Works*, ed. Moore, 17 vols. 1832 ; *Life*, i. 102.

friendships were passions." Many years after he left Harrow, he never heard the name of Lord Clare, one of his old schoolfellows, pronounced, without "a beating of the heart."<sup>1</sup> A score of times he got himself into trouble for his friends, offering them his time, his pen, his purse. One day, at Harrow, a big boy claimed the right to fag his friend, little Peel, and finding him refractory, gave him a beating on the inner fleshy side of his arm, which he had twisted round to render the pain more acute. Byron, too small to fight the rascal, came up to him, "blushing with rage," tears in his eyes, and asked with a trembling voice how many stripes he meant to inflict. "Why," returned the executioner, "you little rascal, what is that to you?" "Because, if you please," said Byron, holding out his arm, "I would take half."<sup>2</sup> He never met with objects of distress without affording them succour.<sup>3</sup> In his latter days in Italy, he gave away a thousand pounds out of every four thousand he spent. The upwellings of this heart were too copious, and flooded forth good and evil impetuously, and at the least collision. Like Dante, in his early youth, Byron, at the age of eight, fell in love with a child named Mary Duff.

"How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl, at an age when I could neither feel passion, nor know the meaning of the word! . . . I recollect all our caresses, . . . my restlessness, my sleeplessness. My misery, my love for that girl were so violent, that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since. When I heard of her being married, . . . it nearly threw me into convulsions."<sup>4</sup>

At twelve years he fell in love with his cousin, Margaret Parker :

<sup>1</sup> *Byron's Works, Life*, i. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 24.

"My passion had its usual effects upon me. I could not sleep—I could not eat—I could not rest; and although I had reason to know that she loved me, it was the texture of my life to think of the time which must elapse before we could meet again, being usually about twelve hours of separation. But I was a fool then, and am not much wiser now."<sup>1</sup>

He never was wiser, read hard at school; took too much exercise; later on, at Cambridge, Newstead, and London, he changed night into day, rushed into debauchery, kept long fasts, led an unwholesome way of living, and engaged in the extreme of every taste and every excess. As he was a dandy, and one of the most brilliant, he nearly let himself die of hunger for fear of becoming fat, then drank and ate greedily during his nights of recklessness. Moore said:

"Lord Byron, for the last two days, had done nothing towards sustenance beyond eating a few biscuits and (to appease appetite) chewing mastic. . . . He confined himself to lobsters, and of these finished two or three to his own share,—interposing, sometimes, a small liqueur-glass of strong white brandy, sometimes a tumbler of very hot water, and then pure brandy again, to the amount of near half a dozen small glasses of the latter. . . . After this we had claret, of which having despatched two bottles between us, at about four o'clock in the morning we parted."<sup>2</sup>

Another day we find in Byron's journal the following words:

"Yesterday, dined *à-la-tête* at the "Cocoa" with Scrope Davies—sat from six till midnight—drank between us one bottle of champagne and six of claret, neither of which wines ever affect me."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, *L&S*, i. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 20, March 28, 1814.

Later, at Venice :

"I have hardly had a wink of sleep this week past. I have had some curious masking adventures this carnival. . . . I will work the mine of my youth to the last vein of the ore, and then—good night. I have lived, and am content."<sup>1</sup>

At this rate the organs wear out, and intervals of temperance are not sufficient to repair them. The stomach does not continue to act, the nerves get out of order, and the soul undermines the body, and the body the soul.

"I always wake in actual despair and despondency, in all respects, even of that which pleased me over-night. In England, five years ago, I had the same kind of hypochondria, but accompanied with so violent a thirst that I have drank as many as fifteen bottles of soda-water in one night after going to bed, and been still thirsty, . . . striking off the necks of bottles from mere thirsty impatience."<sup>2</sup>

Much less is necessary to ruin mind and body wholly. Thus these vehement minds live, ever driven and broken by their own energy, like a cannon ball, which, when fired, turns and spins round quickly, but at the smallest obstacle leaps up, rebounds, destroys everything, and ends by burying itself in the earth. Beyle, a most shrewd observer, who lived with Byron for several weeks, says that on certain days he was mad ; at other times, in presence of beautiful things, he became sublime. Though reserved and proud, music made him weep. The rest of his time, petty English passions, pride of rank, for instance, a vain dandyism, unhinged him : he spoke of Brummel with a shudder of jealousy and

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, *Life*, iv. 81 ; Letter to Moore, Feb. 12, 1818.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 96, Feb. 2, 1821.

admiration. But small or great, the passion of the hour swept down upon his mind like a tempest, roused him, transported him either into imprudence or genius. Byron's own Journal, his familiar letters, all his unstudied prose, is, as it were, trembling with wit, anger, enthusiasm; the smallest words breathe sensitiveness; since Saint Simon we have not seen more lifelike confidences. All styles appear dull, and all souls sluggish by the side of his.

In this splendid rush of unbridled and disbanded faculties, which leaped up at random, and seemed to drive him without option to the four quarters of the globe, one took the reins, and cast him on the wall against which he was broken.

"Sir Walter Scott describes Lord Byron as being a man of real goodness of heart, and the kindest and best feelings, miserably thrown away by his foolish contempt of public opinion. Instead of being warned or checked by public opposition, it roused him to go on in a worse strain, as if he said, 'Ay, you don't like it; well, you shall have something worse for your pains.'" <sup>1</sup>

This rebellious instinct is inherent in the race; there was a whole cluster of wild passions, born of the climate,<sup>2</sup> which nourished him: a gloomy humour, violent imagination, indomitable pride, a relish for danger, a craving for strife, that inner exaltation, only satiated by destruction, and that sombre madness which

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, vii. 323.

<sup>2</sup> "If I was born, as the nurses say, with a 'silver spoon in my mouth,' it has stuck in my throat, and spoiled my palate, so that nothing put into it is swallowed with much relish,—unless it be cayenne. . . . I see no such horror in a dreamless sleep, and I have no conception of any existence which duration would not make tiresome."

urged forward the Scandinavian Berserkirs, when, in an open bark, beneath a sky cloven with lightning, they abandoned themselves to the tempest, whose fury they had breathed. This instinct is in the blood: people are born so, as they are born lions or bull-dogs.<sup>1</sup> Byron was still a little boy in petticoats when his nurse scolded him roughly for having soiled or torn a new frock which he had just put on. He got into one of his silent rages, seized the garment with his hands, rent it from top to bottom, and stood erect, motionless, and gloomy before the storming nurse, so as to set more effectually her wrath at defiance. His pride mastered him. When at ten he inherited the title of lord, and his name was first called at school, preceded by the title *dominus*, he could not answer the customary *adsum*, stood silent amidst the general stare of his school-fellows, and at last burst into tears. Another time, at Harrow, in a dispute which was dividing the school, a boy said, "Byron won't join us, for he never likes to be second anywhere." He was offered the command, and then only would he condescend to take part with them. Never to submit to a master; to rise with his whole soul against every semblance of encroachment or rule; to keep his person intact and inviolate at all cost, and to the end against all; to dare everything rather than give any sign of submission,—such was his character. This is why he was disposed to undergo anything rather than give signs of weakness. At ten he was a stoic from pride. His foot was painfully stretched in a wooden contrivance whilst he was taking

<sup>1</sup> "I like Junius: he was a good hater.—I don't understand yielding sensitiveness. What I feel is an immense rage for forty-eight hours."



his Latin lesson, and his master pitied him, saying "he must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers," he said, "you shall not see any signs of it in me."<sup>1</sup> Such as he was as a child, he continued as a man. In mind and body he strove, or prepared himself for strife. Every day, for hours at a time, he boxed, fired pistols, practised sword-exercise, ran and leaped, rode, overcame obstacles. These were the exploits of his hands and muscles; but he needed others. For lack of enemies he found fault with society, and made war upon it. We know to what excesses the dominant opinions then ran. England was at the height of the war with France, and thought it was fighting for morality and liberty. In English eyes, at this time, Church and State were holy things: any one who touched them became a public enemy. In this fit of national passion and Protestant severity, whosoever publicly avowed liberal ideas and manners seemed an incendiary, and stirred up against himself the instincts of property, the doctrines of moralists, the interests of politicians, and the prejudices of the people. Byron chose this moment to praise Voltaire and Rousseau, to admire Napoleon, to avow himself a sceptic, to plead for nature and pleasure against cant and regularity, to say that high English society, debauched and hypocritical, made phrases and killed men, to preserve its sinecures and rotten boroughs. As though political hatred was not enough, he contracted, in addition, literary animosities, attacked the whole body of critics,<sup>2</sup> ran down the new poetry, declared that the most celebrated were "Claudian," men of the later empire, raged against the Lake

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, *Life*, i. 41.

<sup>2</sup> In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

school, and in consequence had in Southey a bitter and unwearied enemy. Thus provided with enemies, he laid himself open to attack on all sides. He decried himself through his hatred of cant, his bravado, his boasting about his vices. He depicted himself in his heroes, but for the worse; in such a way that no man could fail to recognise him, and think him much worse than he was. Walter Scott wrote, immediately after seeing *Childe Harold*:

"*Childe Harold* is, I think, a very clever poem, but gives no good symptom of the writer's heart or morals. . . . Vice ought to be a little more modest, and it must require impudence almost equal to the noble Lord's other powers, to claim sympathy gravely for the ennui arising from his being tired of his wassailers and his paramours. There is a monstrous deal of conceit in it, too, for it is informing the inferior part of the world that their little old-fashioned scruples of limitation are not worthy of his regard."<sup>1</sup>

"My noble friend is something like my old peacock, who chooses to bivouac apart from his lady, and sit below my bedroom window, to keep me awake with his screeching lamentation. Only, I own he is not equal in melody to Lord Byron."<sup>2</sup>

Such were the sentiments which he called forth in all respectable classes. He was pleased thereat, and did worse—giving out that in his adventures in the East he had dared a good many things; and he was not indignant when identified with his heroes. He said he should like to feel for once the sensations of a man who had committed a murder. Another time he wrote in his Diary:

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, iii. 389.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 141.

"Hobhouse told me an odd report,—that I am the actual Conrad, the veritable Corsair, and that part of my travels are supposed to have passed in piracy. Um! people sometimes hit near the truth, but never the whole truth. He don't know what I was about the year after he left the Levant; nor does any one—nor—nor—nor—however, it is a lie—"but I doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth.""<sup>1</sup>

These dangerous words were turned against him like a dagger; but he loved danger, mortal danger, and was only at ease when he saw the points of all angers bristling against him. Alone against all, against an armed society; erect, invincible, even against common sense, even against conscience,—it was then he felt in all his strained nerves the great and terrible sensation, to which his whole being involuntarily inclined.

A last imprudence brought down the attack. As long as he was an unmarried man, his excesses might be excused by the over-strong passions of a temperament which often causes youth in England to revolt against good taste and rule; but marriage settles them, and it was marriage which in him completed his un-settling. He found that his wife was a kind of paragon of virtue, known as such, "a creature of rule," correct and without feelings, incapable of committing a fault herself, and of forgiving. His servant Fletcher observed, "It is very odd, but I never yet knew a lady that could not manage my Lord *except* my Lady."<sup>2</sup> Lady Byron thought her husband mad, and had him examined by physicians. Having learned that he was in his right mind, she left him, returned to her

<sup>1</sup> Moore's *Life of Byron*, iii. 12, March 10, Thor's day. The last part of the sentence is a quotation from *Macbeth*, v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 169, note.

father, and refused ever to see him again. Thereupon he passed for a monster. The papers covered him with obloquy; his friends induced him not to go to a theatre or to Parliament, fearing that he would be hooted or insulted. The rage and pangs which so violent a soul, precociously accustomed to brilliant glory felt in this universal storm of outrage, can only be learned from his verses. He grew stubborn, went to Venice, and steeped himself in the voluptuous Italian life, even in low debauchery, the better to insult the Puritan prudery which had condemned him, and left it only through an offence still more blamed, his public intimacy with the young Countess Guiccioli. Meanwhile he showed himself as bitterly republican in politics as in morality. He wrote in 1813: "I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments." This time, at Ravenna, his house was the centre and storehouse of conspirators, and he generously and imprudently prepared to take arms with them, to strike for the deliverance of Italy:

"They mean to insurrect here, and are to honour me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back; though I don't think them in force and heart sufficient to make much of it. But, *onward*. . . What signifies *self*? . . . It is not one man nor a million, but the *spirit* of liberty which must be spread. . . . The mere selfish calculation ought never to be made on such occasions; and, at present, it shall not be computed by me. . . . I should almost regret that my own affairs went well, when those of nations are in peril."<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime he had quarrels with the police: his house was watched, he was threatened with assassina-

<sup>1</sup> Moore, *Byron's Works*; *L4/a*, v. 67, Jan. 2, 1821.

tion, and yet he rode out daily, and went into the neighbouring pine-forest to practice pistol-shooting. These are the sentiments of a man standing at the muzzle of a loaded cannon, waiting for it to go off. The emotion is great, nay, heroic, but it is not agreeable; and certainly, even at this season of great emotion, he was unhappy. Nothing is more likely to poison happiness than a combative spirit. He writes:

"What is the reason that I have been, all my lifetime, more or less *ennuyé*? . . . I do not know how to answer this, but presume that it is constitutional,—as well as the waking in low spirits, which I have invariably done for many years. Temperance and exercise, which I have practised at times, and for a long time together vigorously and violently, made little or no difference. Violent passions did: when under their immediate influence—it is odd, but—I was in agitated, but *not* in depressed spirits. . . . Wine and spirits make me sullen and savage to ferocity—silent, however, and retiring, and not quarrelsome, if not spoken to. Swimming also raises my spirits; but in general they are low, and get daily lower. That is *hopeless*; for I do not think I am so much *ennuyé* as I was at nineteen. The proof is, that then I must game, or drink, or be in motion of some kind, or I was miserable."<sup>1</sup>

"What I feel most growing upon me are laziness, and a disrelish more powerful than indifference. If I rouse, it is into fury. I presume that I shall end (if not earlier by accident, or some such termination) like Swift, "dying at top."<sup>2</sup> Lega (his servant) came in with a letter about a bill unpaid at Venice which I thought paid months ago. I flew into a paroxysm of rage, which almost made me faint. I have always had *une âme*, which not only tormented itself, but everybody else in contact with it, and an *esprit violent*, which has almost left me without any *esprit* at all."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Moore, Byron's Works; *Life*, v. 60. Jan. 6, 1821.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 97, Feb. 2, 1821.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 95.

A horrible foreboding, which haunted him to the end ! On his deathbed, in Greece, he refused, I know not why, to be bled, and preferred to die at once. They threatened that the uncontrolled disease might end in madness. He sprang up : " There ! you are, I see, a d—d set of butchers ! Take away as much blood as you like, but have done with it,"<sup>1</sup> and stretched out his arm. Amidst such wild outbursts and anxieties he passed his life. Anguish endured, danger braved, resistance overcome, grief relished, all the greatness and sadness of the black warlike madness,—such are the images which he needs must let pass before him. In default of action he had dreams, and he only betook himself to dreams for want of action. He said, when embarking for Greece, that he had taken poetry for lack of better, and that it was not his fit work. " What is a poet ? what is he worth ? what does he do ? He is a babbler." He augured ill of the poetry of his age, even of his own ; saying that, if he lived ten years more, they should see something else from him than verses. In reality, he would have been more at home as a sea-king, or a captain of a band of troopers during the Middle-ages. Except two or three gleams of Italian sunshine, his poetry and life, are those of a Scald transplanted into modern life, who in this over-well regulated world did not find his vocation.

## II.

Byron was a poet, but in his own way—a strange way, like that in which he lived. There were internal tempests within him, avalanches of ideas, which found issue only in writing. He wrote : " I have

<sup>1</sup> Moore, *Byron's Works* ; *Life*, vi. 206.

written from the fulness of my mind, from passion, from impulse, from many motives, but not 'for their sweet voices.' To withdraw myself from myself has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all—and publishing also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself." He wrote almost always with astonishing rapidity, *The Corsair*, in ten days, *The Bride of Abydos* in four days. While it was printing he added and corrected, but without recasting: "I told you before that I can never recast anything. I am like the tiger. If I miss the first spring, I go grumbling back to my jungle again; but if I do it, it is crushing."<sup>1</sup> Doubtless he sprang, but he had a chain: never, in the freest flight of his thoughts, did he liberate himself from himself. He dreams of himself, and sees himself throughout. It is a boiling torrent, but hedged in with rocks. No such great poet has had so narrow an imagination; he could not metamorphose himself into another. They are his own sorrows, his own revolts, his own travels, which, hardly transformed and modified, he introduces into his verses. He does not invent, he observes; he does not create, he transcribes. His copy is darkly exaggerated, but it is a copy. "I could not write upon anything," says he, "without some personal experience and foundation." We will find in his letters and note-books, almost feature for feature, the most striking of his descriptions. The capture of Ismail, the shipwreck of Don Juan, are, almost word for word, like two accounts of it in prose. If none but cockneys could attribute to him the crimes of his heroes, none but blind men could fail to see in him the sentiments of his

<sup>1</sup> Moore, *Byron's Works*; *Life*, v. 33, Ravenna, Nov. 18, 1820.

characters. This is so true, that he has not created more than one. Childe Harold, Lara, the Giaour, the Corsair, Manfred, Sardanapalus, Cain, Tasso, Dante, and the rest, are always the same—one man represented under various costumes, in several lands, with different expressions; but just as painters do, when, by change of garments, decorations, and attitudes, they draw fifty portraits from the same model. He meditated too much upon himself to be enamoured of anything else. The habitual sternness of his will prevented his mind from being flexible; his force, always concentrated for effort and bent upon strife, shut him up in self-contemplation, and reduced him never to make a poem, save of his own heart.

What style would he adopt? With these concentrated and tragic sentiments he had a classical mind. By the strangest mixture, the books, which he preferred, were at once the most violent or the most proper, the Bible above all: "I am a great reader and admirer of those books (the Bible), and had read them through and through before I was eight years old; that is to say, the Old Testament, for the New struck me as a task, but the other as a pleasure."<sup>1</sup> Observe this word: he did not relish the tender and self-denying mysticism of the gospel, but the cruel sternness and lyrical outcries of the old Hebrews. Next to the Bible he loved Pope, the most correct and formal of men:

"As to Pope, I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry. Depend upon it, the rest are barbarians. He is a Greek Temple, with a Gothic Cathedral on one hand, and a Turkish Mosque and all sorts of fantastic pagodas and conventicles about him. You may call Shakspeare and Milton

<sup>1</sup> Moore, *Byron's Works*; *Life*, v. 265.



pyramids, but I prefer the Temple of Theseus or the Parthenon to a mountain of burnt brickwork. . . . The grand distinction of the underforms of the new school of poets is their vulgarity. By this I do not mean they are coarse, but shabby-genteel."<sup>1</sup>

And he presently wrote two letters with incomparable vivacity and spirit, to defend Pope against the scorn of modern writers. These writers, according to him, have spoiled the public taste. The only ones who were worth anything—Crabbe, Campbell, Rogers—imitate the style of Pope. A few others had talent; but, take them all together, those who had come last had perverted literature: they did not know their own language; their expressions are only approximate, above or below the true tone, forced or dull. He ranges himself amongst the corrupters,<sup>2</sup> and we soon see that this theory is not an invention, springing from bad temper and polemics; he returns to it. In his two first attempts—*Hours of Idleness, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*—he tried to follow it up. Later, and in almost all his works, we find its effect. He recommends and practises the rule of unity in tragedy. He loves oratorical form, symmetrical phrase, condensed style. He likes to plead his passions. Sheridan tried to induce Byron to devote himself to eloquence; and the vigour, piercing logic, wonderful vivacity, close argument of his prose, prove that he would have taken the first rank amongst pamphleteers.<sup>3</sup> If he attains to it amongst the poets it is partly due to his classical system. This oratorical

<sup>1</sup> Moore, Byron's Works; *Life*, v. 150, Ravenna, May 3, 1821.

<sup>2</sup> "All the styles of the day are bombastic. I don't except my own; no one has done more through negligence to corrupt the language."

<sup>3</sup> See his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.



*THOMAS CAMPBELL*





form, in which Pope compresses his thought like *La Bruyère*, magnifies the force and swing of vehement ideas; like a narrow and straight canal, it collects and dashes them in their right direction; there is then nothing which their impetus does not carry away; and it is thus Lord Byron from the first, in the face of hostile criticisms, and over jealous reputations, has made his way to the public.<sup>1</sup>

Thus *Childe Harold* made its way. At the first onset every man who read it was agitated. It was more than an author who spoke; it was a man. In spite of his denial, the author was identified with his hero: he calumniated himself, but still it was himself whom he portrayed. He was recognised in that young voluptuous and disgusted man, ready to weep amidst his orgies, who

“Sore sick at heart,  
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;  
’Tis said, at times the sullen tear would start,  
But Pride congeal’d the drop within his ee:  
Apart he stalk’d in joyless reverie,  
And from his native land resolved to go,  
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;  
With pleasure drugg’d, he almost long’d for woe.”<sup>2</sup>

Fleeing from his native land, he carried, amongst the splendours and cheerfulness of the south, his unwearying persecutor, “demon thought,” implacable behind him. The scenery was recognised: it had been copied on the spot. And what was the whole book but a diary of travel? He said in it what he had seen and thought. What poetic fiction is so valuable as genuine sensation?

<sup>1</sup> Thirty thousand copies of the *Corssair* were sold in one day.

<sup>2</sup> Byron’s Works, viii.; *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, c. i. 6.

What is more penetrating than confidence, voluntary or involuntary? Truly, every word here expressed an emotion of eye or heart :

“The tender azure of the unruffled deep. . . .  
The mountain-moss by scorching skies imbrown'd . . .  
The orange tints that gild the greenest bough.” . . .<sup>1</sup>

All these beauties, calm or imposing, he had enjoyed, and sometimes suffered through them ; and hence we see them through his verse. Whatever he touched, he made palpitate and live ; because, when he saw it, his heart had beaten and he had lived. He himself, a little later, quitting the mask of Harold, took up the parable in his own name ; and who is not touched by an avowal so passionate and complete ?

“Yet must I think less wildly :—I *have* thought  
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,  
In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,  
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame :  
And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,  
My springs of life were poison'd. 'Tis too late !  
Yet am I changed : though still enough the same  
In strength to bear what time can not abate,  
And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate. . . .

But soon he knew himself the most unfit  
Of men to herd with Man ; with whom he held  
Little in common ; untaught to submit  
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quell'd  
In youth by his own thoughts ; still uncompell'd,  
He would not yield dominion of his mind  
To spirits against whom his own rebell'd ;  
Proud though in desolation, which could find,  
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, c. i. 19.

Like the Chaldean, he could watch the stars,  
Till he had peopled them with beings bright  
As their own beams ; and earth, and earth-born jars,  
And human frailties, were forgotten quite :  
Could he have kept his spirit to that flight  
He had been happy ; but this clay will sink  
Its spark immortal, envying it the light  
To which it mounts, as if to break the link  
That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

But in Man's dwellings he became a thing  
Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,  
Droop'd as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing,  
To whom the boundless air alone were home :  
Then came his fit again, which to o'ercome,  
As eagerly the barr'd-up bird will beat  
His breast and beak against his wiry dome  
Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat  
Of his impeded soul would through his bosom eat."<sup>1</sup>

Such are the sentiments wherewith he surveyed nature and history, not to comprehend them and forget himself before them, but to seek in them and impress upon them the image of his own passions. He does not leave objects to speak of themselves, but forces them to answer him. Amidst their peace, he is only occupied by his own emotion. He attunes them to his soul, and compels them to repeat his own cries. All is inflated here, as in himself ; the vast strophe rolls along, carrying in its overflowing bed the flood of vehement ideas ; declamation unfolds itself, pompous, and at times artificial (it was his first work), but potent, and so often sublime that the rhetorical rubbish, which he yet preserved, disappeared under the

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, c. iii. 7-15.



afflux of splendours, with which it is loaded. Wordsworth, Walter Scott, by the side of this prodigality of accumulated splendours, seemed poor and dull; never since Æschylus was seen such a tragic pomp, and men followed with a sort of pang, the train of gigantic figures, whom he brought in mournful ranks before their eyes, from the far past:

“I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;  
 A palace and a prison on each hand:  
 I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
 As from the stroke of the enchanter’s wand:  
 A thousand years, their cloudy wings expand  
 Around me, and a dying Glory smiles  
 O’er the far times, when many a subject land  
 Look’d to the winged Lion’s marble piles,  
 Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!

She looks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean,  
 Rising with her tiara of proud towers  
 At airy distance, with majestic motion,  
 A ruler of the waters and their powers:  
 And such she was!—her daughters had their dowers  
 From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East  
 Pour’d in her lap all gems in sparkling showers.  
 In purple was she robed, and of her feast  
 Monarchs partook, and deem’d their dignity increased. . .<sup>1</sup>

Lo! where the Giant on the mountain stands,  
 His blood-red tresses deep’ning in the sun,  
 With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,  
 And eye that scorcheth all it glares upon;  
 Restless it rolls, now fix’d and now anon  
 Flashing afar,—and at his iron feet  
 Destruction cowers, to mark what deeds are done;

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, c. iv. 1 and 2.

For on this morn three potent nations meet,  
To shed before his shrine the blood he deems most sweet.

By Heaven ! it is a splendid sight to see  
(For one who hath no friend, no brother there)  
Their rival scarfs of mix'd embroidery,  
Their various arms that glitter in the air !  
What gallant war-hounds rouse them from their lair,  
And gnash their fangs, loud yelling for the prey !  
All join the chase, but few the triumph share ;  
The Grave shall bear the chiefest prize away,  
And Havoc scarce for joy can number their array. . .<sup>1</sup>

What from this barren being do we reap ?  
Our senses narrow, and our reason frail,  
Life short, and truth a gem which loves the deep,  
And all things weigh'd in custom's falsest scale ;  
Opinion an omnipotence, whose veil  
Mantles the earth with darkness, until right  
And wrong are accidents, and men grow pale  
Lest their own judgments should become too bright,  
And their free thoughts be crimes, and earth have too much  
light.

And thus they plod in sluggish misery,  
Rotting from sire to son, and age to age,  
Proud of their trampled nature, and so die,  
Bequeathing their hereditary rage  
To the new race of inborn slaves, who wage  
War for their chains, and rather than be free,  
Bleed gladiator-like and still engage  
Within the same arena where they see  
Their fellows fall before, like leaves of the same tree."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, c. i. 39 and 40.


<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. iv. 93 and 94.

Has ever style better expressed a soul? It is seen here labouring and expanding. Long and stormily the ideas boiled within this soul like bars of metal heaped in the furnace. They melted there before the strain of the intense heat; they mingled therein their heated mass amidst convulsions and explosions, and then at last the door is opened; a slow stream of fire descends into the trough prepared beforehand, heating the circumambient air, and its glittering hues scorch the eyes which persist in looking upon it.

### III.

Description and monologue did not suffice Byron; and he needed, to express his ideal, events and actions. Only events try the force and elasticity of the soul; only actions display and regulate this force and elasticity. Amidst events he sought for the most powerful, amidst actions the strongest; and we see appear successively *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *Parisina*, *The Siege of Corinth*, *Mazeppa*, and *The Prisoner of Chillon*.

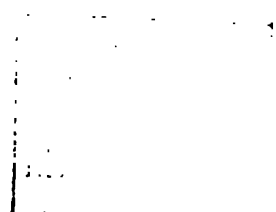
I know that these sparkling poems have grown dull in forty years. In their necklace of Oriental pearls have been discovered beads of glass; and Byron, who only half loved them, judged better than his judges. Yet he judged amiss; those which he preferred are the most false. His *Corsair* is marred by classic elegancies: the pirates' song at the beginning is no truer than a chorus at the Italian Opera; his scamps propound philosophical antitheses as balanced as those of Pope. A hundred times ambition, glory, envy, despair, and the other abstract personages, whose images in the time of the first Empire the French used





ALEXANDER POPE





to set upon their drawing-room clocks, break in amidst living passions.<sup>1</sup> The noblest passages are disfigured by pedantic apostrophes, and the pretentious poetic diction sets up its threadbare frippery and conventional ornaments.<sup>2</sup> Far worse, he studies effect and follows the fashion. Melodramatic strings pull his characters at the right time, so as to obtain the grimace which shall make his public shudder :

“ Who thundering comes on blackest steed,  
With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed !  
. . . Approach, thou craven crouching slave,  
Say, is not this Thermopylæ ? ”

Wretched mannerisms, emphatic and vulgar, imitated from Lucan and our modern Lucans, but which produce their effect only on a first perusal, and on the common herd of readers. There is an infallible means of attracting a mob, which is, to shout out loud ; with shipwrecks, sieges, murders, and combats, we shall always interest them ; show them pirates, desperate adventurers,—these distorted or raging faces will draw them out of their regular and monotonous existence ; they will go to see them as they go to melodramas, and through the same instinct which induces them to read novels in penny numbers. Add, by way of contrast, angelic women, tender and submissive, beautiful as angels.

<sup>1</sup> For example, “ as weeping Beauty's cheek at Sorrow's tale.”

Here are verses like Pope, very beautiful and false :

“ And havoc loath so much the waste of time,  
She scarce had left an uncommitted crime.  
One hour beheld him since the tide he stemm'd,  
Disguised, discover'd, conquering, ta'en, condemn'd,  
A chief on land, an outlaw on the deep,  
Destroying, saving, prison'd, and asleep ! ”



Byron describes all this, and adds to these seductions a bewitching scenery, oriental or picturesque adornments; old Alpine castles, the Mediterranean waves, the setting suns of Greece, the whole in high relief, with marked shadows and brilliant colours. We are all of the people, as regards emotion; and the great lady, like the waiting-woman, sheds tears, without cavilling with the author as to the means he uses.

And yet, after all, there is a great deal of truth in Byron's poems. No; this man is not a mere arranger of effects or an inventor of phrases. He has lived amidst the spectacles he describes; he has experienced the emotions he relates. He has been in the tent of Ali Pacha, and relished the strong savour of ocean adventure and savage manners. He has been a score of times near death,—in the Morea, in the anguish and the solitude of fever; at Suli, in a shipwreck; at Malta, in England, and in Italy, in the dangers of a duel, plots of insurrection, commencements of sudden attacks, at sea, in arms, on horseback, having seen assassination, wounds, agonies close to him, and that more than once. "I am living here exposed to it (assassination) daily, for I have happened to make a powerful and unprincipled man my enemy; and I never sleep the worse for it, or ride in less solitary places, because precaution is useless, and one thinks of it as of a disease which may or may not strike."<sup>1</sup> He spoke the truth; no one ever held himself more erect and firm in danger. One day, near the Gulf of San Fiorenzo, his yacht was thrown on the coast; the sea was terrific, and the rocks in sight; the passengers kissed their rosaries, or fainted with horror; and the two captains being consulted,

<sup>1</sup> Moore's *Life*, iv. 345.

declared shipwreck inevitable. "Well," said Lord Byron, "we are all born to die; I shall go with regret, but certainly not with fear." And he took off his clothes, begging the others to do the same, not that they could save themselves amidst such waves; but "it is every man's duty to endeavour to preserve the life God has given him; so I advise you all to strip: swimming, indeed, can be of little use in these billows; but as children, when tired with crying, sink placidly to repose, we, when exhausted with struggling, shall die the easier. . . ." He then sat down, folding his arms, very calm; he even joked with the captain, who was putting his dollars into his waistcoat pocket. . . . The ship approached the rocks. All this time Byron was not seen to change countenance. A man thus tried and moulded can paint extreme situations and sentiments. After all, they are never painted otherwise than by experience. The most inventive—Dante and Shakspeare—though quite different, yet do the same thing. However high their genius rose, it always had its feet on observation; and their most foolish, as well as their most splendid pictures, never offer to the world more than an image of their age, or of their own heart. At most, they *deduce*; that is, having derived from two or three features the inward qualities of the man within themselves and of the men around them, they draw thence, by a sudden ratiocination of which they have no consciousness, the varied skein of actions and sentiments. They may be artists, but they are observers. They may invent, but they describe. Their glory does not consist in the display of a phantasmagoria, but in the discovery of a truth. They are the first to enter some unexplored province of humanity, which becomes

their domain, and thenceforth supports their name like an appanage. Byron found his domain, which is that of sad and tender sentiments: it is a heath, and full of ruins; but he is at home there, and he is alone.

What an abode! And it is on this desolation that he dwells. He muses on it. See the brothers of Childe Harold pass—the characters who people it. One in his prison, chained up with his two remaining brothers. Their father and three others had perished fighting, or were burnt for their faith. One by one, before the eyes of the eldest, the last two languish and fade: a silent and slow agony amidst the damp darkness into which a beam of the sickly sun pierces through a crevice. After the death of the first, the survivors “begged as a boon” that he shall at least be buried on a spot “whereon the day might shine.” The jailers

“Coldly laugh’d—and laid him there:  
The flat and turfless earth above  
The being we so much did love;  
His empty chain above it leant.”<sup>1</sup>

Then the youngest “faded” daily

With all the while a cheek whose bloom  
Was as a mockery of the tomb,  
Whose tints as gently sunk away  
As a departing rainbow’s ray.”<sup>2</sup>

But the pillars to which they are chained are too far apart,—the elder cannot approach his dying younger brother; he listens and hears the failing sighs; he cries for succour, and none comes. He bursts his chain with one strong bound: all is over. He takes that cold hand,

<sup>1</sup> Byron’s Works, x. *The Prisoner of Chillon*, c. vii. 234.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. viii. 235.

and then, before the motionless body, his senses are lost, his thoughts arrested ; he is like a drowning man, who, after passing through pangs of agony, lets himself sink down like a stone, and no longer feels existence but by a complete petrification of horror. Here is another brother of Childe Harold, Mazeppa, bound naked on a wild horse, rushing over the steppes. He writhes, and his swollen limbs, cut by the cords, are bleeding. A whole day the course continues, and behind him the wolves are howling. The night through he hears their long monotonous chase, and at the end his energy fails.

“ . . . The earth gave way, the skies roll'd round,  
I seem'd to sink upon the ground ;  
But err'd, for I was fastly bound.  
My heart turn'd sick, my brain grew sore,  
And throbb'd awhile, then beat no more ;  
The skies spun like a mighty wheel ;  
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,  
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,  
Which saw no further : he who dies  
Can die no more than then I died. . . .  
I felt the blackness come and go,  
And strove to wake ; but could not make  
My senses climb up from below :  
I felt as on a plank at sea,  
When all the waves that dash o'er thee,  
At the same time upheave and overwhelm,  
And hurl thee towards a desert realm.”<sup>1</sup>

Shall I enumerate them all ? Hugo, Parisina, the Foscari, the Giaour, the Corsair. His hero is always a man striving with the worst anguish, face to face with shipwreck, torture, death,—his own painful and

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xi., *Mazeppa*, c. xiii. 167.

prolonged death, the bitter death of his well-beloved, with remorse for his companion, amidst the gloomy prospects of a threatening eternity, with no other support but innate energy and hardened pride. These men have desired too much, too impetuously, with a senseless swing, like a horse which does not feel the bit, and thenceforth their inner doom drives them to the abyss which they see, and cannot escape from. What a night was that of Alp before Corinth! He is a renegade, and comes with the Mussulmans to besiege the Christians, his old friends—Minotti, the father of the girl he loves. Next day he is to lead the assault, and he thinks of his death, which he forebodes, the carnage of his own soldiers, which he is preparing. There is no inner support, but rooted resentment and a firm and stern will. The Mussulmans despise him, the Christians execrate him, and his glory only publishes his treason. Dejected and fevered, he passes through the sleeping camp, and wanders on the shore :

“Tis midnight : on the mountains brown  
The cold, round moon shines deeply down ;  
Blue roll the waters, blue the sky  
Spreads like an ocean hung on high,  
Bespangled with those isles of light . . .  
The waves on either shore lay there  
Calm, clear, and azure as the air ;  
And scarce their foam the pebbles shook,  
But murmur'd meekly as the brook.  
The winds were pillow'd on the waves ;  
The banners droop'd along their staves . . .  
And that deep silence was unbroke,  
Save where the watch his signal spoke,  
Save where the steed neighed oft and shrill, . . .

And the wide hum of that wild host  
Rustled like leaves from coast to coast." . . .<sup>1</sup>

How the heart sickens before such spectacles ! What a contrast between his agony and the peace of immortal nature ! How man stretches then his arms towards ideal beauty, and how impotently they fall back at the contact of our clay and mortality ! Alp advances over the sandy shore to the foot of the bastion, exposed to the fire of the sentinels ; and he hardly thinks of it :

"And he saw the lean dogs beneath the wall  
Hold o'er the dead their carnival,  
Gorging and growling o'er carcase and limb ;  
They were too busy to bark at him !  
From a Tartar's skull they had stripped the flesh,  
As ye peel the fig when its fruit is fresh ;  
And their white tusks crunched o'er the whiter skull,  
As it slipp'd through their jaws, when their edge grew dull.  
As they lazily mumbled the bones of the dead,  
When they scarce could rise from the spot where they fed  
So well had they broken a lingering fast  
With those who had fallen for that night's repast.  
And Alp knew, by the turbans that roll'd on the sand,  
The foremost of these were the best of his band :  
Crimson and green were the shawls of their wear,  
And each scalp had a single long tuft of hair,  
All the rest was shaven and bare.  
The scalps were in the wild dog's maw,  
The hair was tangled round his jaw.  
But close by the shore on the edge of the gulf,  
There sat a vulture flapping a wolf,  
Who had stolen from the hills, but kept away,  
Scared by the dogs, from the human prey ;

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, x., *The Siege of Corinth*, c. xi. 116.

But he seized on his share of a steed that lay,  
Pick'd by the birds, on the sands of the bay."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the goal of man; the hot frenzy of life ends here; buried or not, it matters little: vultures or jackals, one gravedigger is as good as another. The storm of his rages and his efforts have but served to cast him to these animals for their food, and to their beaks and jaws he comes only with the sentiment of frustrated hopes and insatiable desires. Could any of us forget the death of Lara after once reading it? Has any one elsewhere seen, save in Shakspeare, a sadder picture of the destiny of a man vainly rearing against inevitable fate? Though generous, like Macbeth, he has, like Macbeth, dared everything against law and conscience, even against pity and the most ordinary feelings of honour. Crimes committed have forced him into other crimes, and blood poured out has made him glide into a pool of blood. As a corsair, he has slain; as a cut-throat, he assassinates; and his former murders which haunt his dreams come with their bat's-wings beating against the portals of his brain. He does not drive them away, these black visitors; though the mouth remains silent, the pallid brow and strange smile bear witness to their approach. And yet it is a noble spectacle to see man standing with calm countenance even under their touch. The last day comes, and six inches of iron suffice for all this energy and fury. Lara is lying beneath a lime tree, and his wound "is bleeding fast from life away." With each convulsion the stream gushes blacker, then stops; the blood flows now only drop by drop, and his brow is already moist, his eyes

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, x., *The Siege of Corinth*, c. xvi. 123.

dim. The victors arrive—he does not deign to answer them; the priest brings near the absolving cross, “but he look’d upon it with an eye profane.” What remains to him of life is for his poor page, the only being who loved him, who has followed him to the end, and who now tries to stanch the blood from his wound :

“He scarce can speak, but motions him ’tis vain,  
He clasps the hand that pang which would assuage,  
And sadly smiles his thanks to that dark page. . . .  
His dying tones are in that other tongue,  
To which some strange remembrance wildly clung. . . .  
And once, as Kaled’s answering accents ceased,  
Rose Lara’s hand, and pointed to the East :  
Whether (as then the breaking sun from high  
Roll’d back the clouds) the morrow caught his eye,  
Or that ’twas chance, or some remember’d scene,  
That raised his arm to point where such had been,  
Scarce Kaled seem’d to know, but turn’d away,  
As if his heart abhorr’d that coming day,  
And shrunk his glance before that morning light,  
To look on Lara’s brow—where all grew night. . . .  
But from his visage little could we guess,  
So unrepentant, dark, and passionless. . . .  
But gasping heaved the breath that Lara drew,  
And dull the film along his dim eye grew ;  
His limbs stretch’d fluttering, and his head droop’d o’er.”<sup>1</sup>

All is over, and of this haughty spirit there remains but a poor piece of clay. After all, it is the desirable lot of such hearts ; they have spent life amiss, and only rest well in the tomb.

A strange and altogether northern poetry, with its root in the Edda and its flower in Shakspeare, born

<sup>1</sup> Byron’s Works, x. ; *Lara*, c. 2, st. 17–20, 60.



long ago under an inclement sky, on the shores of a stormy ocean,—the work of a too wilful, too strong, too sombre race,—and which, after lavishing its images of desolation and heroism, ends by stretching like a black veil over the whole of living nature the dream of universal destruction: this dream is here, as in the Edda, almost equally grand:

“I had a dream, which was not all a dream.  
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars  
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,  
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;  
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day. . . .  
Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour  
They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks  
Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black. . . .  
And they did live by watchfires—and the thrones,  
The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,  
The habitations of all things which dwell,  
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed,  
And men were gathered round their blazing homes  
To look once more into each other's face. . . .  
The brows of men by the despairing light  
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits  
The flashes fell upon them; some lay down  
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest  
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled;  
And others hurried to and fro, and fed  
Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up  
With mad disquietude on the dull sky,  
The pall of a past world; and then again  
With curses cast them down upon the dust,  
And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd,  
And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,

And flap their useless wings ; the wildest brutes  
Came tame and tremulous ; and vipers crawl'd  
And twined themselves among the multitude,  
Hissing, but stingless—they were slain for food :  
And War, which for a moment was no more,  
Did glut himself again ;—a meal was bought  
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart  
Gorging himself in gloom : no love was left ;  
All earth was but one thought—and that was death,  
Immediate and inglorious ; and the pang  
Of famine fed upon all entrails—men  
Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh ;  
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd,  
Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,  
And he was faithful to a corse, and kept  
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,  
Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead  
Lured their lank jaws ; himself sought out no food,  
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,  
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand  
Which answer'd not with a caress—he died.  
The crowd was famish'd by degrees ; but two  
Of an enormous city did survive,  
And they were enemies : they met beside  
The dying embers of an altar-place  
Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things  
For an unholy usage ; they raked up,  
And shivering scraped with their cold skeleton hands  
The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath  
Blew for a little life, and made a flame  
Which was a mockery ; then they lifted up  
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld  
Each other's aspects—saw, and shriek'd, and died—  
Even of their mutual hideousness they died.”<sup>1</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, x. ; *Darkness*, 283.

## IV.

Amongst these unrestrained and gloomy poems, which incessantly return and dwell on the same subject, there is one more imposing and lofty than the rest, *Manfred*, twin-brother of the greatest poem of the age, Goethe's *Faust*. Goethe says of Byron: "This singular intellectual poet has taken my Faustus to himself, and extracted from it the strongest nourishment for his hypochondriac humour. He has made use of the impelling principles in his own way, for his own purposes, so that no one of them remains the same; and it is particularly on this account that I cannot enough admire his genius." The play is indeed original. Byron writes: "His (Goethe's) *Faust* I never read, for I don't know German; but Matthew Monk Lewis, in 1816, at Coligny, translated most of it to me *vivâ voce*, and I was naturally much struck with it; but it was the *Steinbach* and the *Jungfrau* and something else, much more than Faustus, that made me write *Manfred*."<sup>1</sup> Goethe adds: "The whole is so completely formed anew, that it would be an interesting task for the critic to point out not only the alterations he (Byron) has made, but their degree of resemblance or dissimilarity to the original." Let us speak of it, then, quite freely: the subject of *Manfred* is the dominant idea of the age, expressed so as to display the contrast of two masters, and of two nations.

What constitutes Goethe's glory is, that in the nineteenth century he did produce an epic poem—I mean a poem in which genuine gods act and speak.

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, iv. 320; Letter to Mr. Murray, Ravenna, June 7, 1820.

This appeared impossible in the nineteenth century, since the special work of our age is the refined consideration of creative ideas, and the suppression of the poetic characters by which other ages have never failed to represent them. Of the two divine families, the Greek and the Christian, neither seemed capable of re-entering the epic world. Classic literature dragged down in its fall the mythological puppets, and the ancient gods slept on their old Olympus, whither history and archæology alone might go to arouse them. The angels and saints of the Middle-ages, as strange and almost as far from our thoughts, slept on the vellum of their missals and in the niches of their cathedrals; and if a poet like Chateaubriand, tried to make them enter the modern world,<sup>1</sup> he succeeded only in degrading them, and in making of them vestry decorations and operatic machinery. The mythic credulity disappeared amid the growth of experience, the mystic amid the growth of prosperity. Paganism, at the contact of science, was reduced to the recognition of natural forces; Christianity at the contact of morality, was reduced to the adoration of the ideal. In order again to deify physical powers, man should have become once more a healthy child, as in Homer's time. In order again to deify spiritual powers, man should have become once more a sickly child as in Dante's time. But he was an adult, and could not ascend again to civilisations or epics, from which the current of his thought and of his life had withdrawn him for ever. How was he to be shown his gods, the modern gods? how could he reclothe them in a personal and visible form, since he had

<sup>1</sup> The angel of holy loves, the angel of the ocean, the choirs of happy spirits. See this at length in the *Martyrs*.

toiled to strip them precisely of all personal and sensible form, and had succeeded in this. Instead of rejecting legend, Goethe took it up again. He chose a mediæval story for his theme. Carefully, scrupulously, he tracked old manners and old beliefs; an alchemist's laboratory, a sorcerer's conjuring-book, coarse villagers, students' or drunkards' gaiety, a witches' meeting on the Brocken, a mass in church; we might fancy we saw an engraving of Luther's time, conscientious and minute: nothing is omitted. Heavenly characters appear in consecrated attitudes after the text of Scripture, like the old mysteries: the Lord with his angels, then with the devil, who comes to ask permission to tempt Faust, as formerly he tempted Job; heaven, as St. Francis imagined it and Van Eyck painted it, with anchorites, holy women and doctors—some in a landscape with bluish rocks, others above in the sublime air, hovering in choirs about the Virgin in glory, one tier above another. Goethe affects even to be so orthodox as to write under each her Latin name, and her due niche in the Vulgate.<sup>1</sup> And this very fidelity proclaims him a sceptic. We see that if he resuscitates the ancient world, it is as a historian, not as a believer. He is only a Christian through remembrance and poetic feeling. In him the modern spirit overflows designedly the narrow vessel in which he designedly seems to enclose it. The thinker percolates through the narrator. Every instant a calculated word, which seems involuntary, opens up glimpses of philosophy, beyond the veils of tradition. Who are they, these supernatural

<sup>1</sup> *Magna peccatrix*, S. Lucæ, vii. 38; *Mulier Samaritana*, S. Johannis, iv.; *Maria Ægyptiaca* (Acta Sanctorum), etc.

personages,—this god, this Mephistopheles, these angels? Their substance incessantly dissolves and re-forms, to show or hide alternately the idea which fills it. Are they abstractions or characters? Mephistopheles, a revolutionary and a philosopher, who has read *Candide*, and cynically jeers at the Powers,—is he anything but “the spirit of negation?”

The angels

“Rejoice to share

The wealth exuberant of all that's fair,  
Which lives, and has its being everywhere!  
And the creative essence which surrounds,  
And lives in all, and worketh ever more,  
Encompass . . . within love's gracious bounds;  
And all the world of things, which flit before  
The gaze in seeming fitful and obscure,  
Do . . . in lasting thoughts embody and secure.”<sup>1</sup>

Are these angels, for an instant at least, anything else than the ideal intelligence which comes, through sympathy, to love all, and through ideas, to comprehend all? What shall we say of this Deity, at first biblical and individual, who little by little is unshaped, vanishes and, sinking to the depths, behind the splendours of living nature and mystic reverie, is confused with the inaccessible absolute? Thus is the whole poem unfolded, action and characters, men and gods, antiquity and middle-ages, aggregate and details, always on the confines of two worlds—one visible and figurative, the other intelligible and formless; one comprehending the moving externals of history or of life, and all that hued and perfumed bloom which nature lavishes on the sur-

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's *Faust*, translated by Theodore Martin. *Prologue in Heaven*.

face of existence, the other containing the profound generative powers and invisible fixed laws by which all these living beings come to the light of day.<sup>1</sup> At last we see our gods: we no longer parody them, like our ancestors, by idols or persons; we perceive them as they are in themselves, and we have no need, in order to see them, to renounce poetry, nor break with the past. We remain on our knees before the shrines where men have prayed for three thousand years; we do not tear a single rose from the chaplets with which they have crowned their divine Madonnas; we do not extinguish a single candle which they have crowded on the altar steps; we behold with an artist's pleasure the precious shrines where, amidst the wrought candlesticks, the suns of diamonds, the gorgeous copes, they have scattered the purest treasures of their genius and their heart. But our thoughts pierce further than our eyes. For us, at certain moments, these draperies, this marble, all this pomp vacillates; it is no longer aught but beautiful phantoms; it vanishes in the smoke, and we discover through it and behind it the impalpable ideal which has set up these pillars, lighted these roofs, and hovered for centuries over the kneeling multitude.

To understand the legend and also to understand life, is the object of this work, and of the whole work of Goethe. Everything, brutish or rational, vile or sublime, fantastic or tangible, is a group of powers, of which our mind, through study and sympathy, may reproduce in itself the elements and the disposition. Let us reproduce it, and give it in our thought a new existence. Is a gossip like Martha, babbling and fool-

<sup>1</sup> Goethe sings: "Wer ruft das Einzelne zur allgemeinen Weihe  
Wo es in herrlichen Accorden schlägt!"

ish—a drunkard like Frosch, brawling and dirty, and the other Dutch boors—unworthy to enter a picture? Even the female apes, and the apes who sit beside the cauldron, watching that it does not boil over, with their hoarse cries and disordered fancies, may repay the trouble of art in restoring them. Wherever there is life, even bestial or maniacal, there is beauty. The more we look upon nature, the more we find it divine—divine even in rocks and plants. Consider these forests, they seem motionless; but the leaves breathe, and the sap mounts insensibly through the massive trunks and branches, to the slender shoots, stretched like fingers at the end of the twigs; it fills the swollen ducts, leaks out in living forms, loads the frail aments with fecundating dust, spreads profusely through the fermenting air the vapours and odours: this luminous air, this dome of verdure, this long colonnade of trees, this silent soil, labour and are transformed; they accomplish a work, and the poet's heart has but to listen to them to find a voice for their obscure instincts. They speak in his heart; still better, they sing, and other beings do the same; each, by its distinct melody, short or long, strange or simple, solely adapted to its nature, capable of manifesting it fully, in the same manner as a sound, by its pitch, its height, its force, manifests the inner structure of the body which has produced it. This melody the poet respects; he avoids altering it by confusing its ideas or accent; his whole care is to keep it intact and pure. Thus is his work produced, an echo of universal nature, a vast chorus in which gods, men, past, present, all periods of history, all conditions of life, all orders of existence agree without confusion, and in which the flexible genius of the



musician, who is alternately transformed into each one of them in order to interpret and comprehend them, only bears witness to his own thought in giving an insight, beyond this immense harmony, into the group of ideal laws whence it is derived, and the inner reason which sustains it.

Beside this lofty conception, what is the supernatural part of *Manfred*? Doubtless Byron is moved by the great things of nature; he has just left the Alps; he has seen those glaciers which are like "a frozen hurricane,"—those "torrents which roll the sheeted silver's waving column o'er the crag's headlong perpendicular, like the pale courser's tail, as told in the *Apocalypse*,"—but he has brought nothing from them but images. His witch, his spirits, his *Arimanes*, are but stage gods. He believes in them no more than we do. Genuine gods are created with much greater difficulty; we must believe in them; we must, like Goethe, have assisted long at their birth, like philosophers and scholars; we must have seen of them more than their externals. He who, whilst continuing a poet, becomes a naturalist and geologist, who has followed in the fissures of the rocks the tortuous waters slowly distilled, and driven at length by their own weight to the light, may ask himself, as the Greeks did formerly, when they saw them roll and sparkle in their emerald tints, what these waters might be thinking, whether they thought. What a strange life is theirs, alternately at rest and in violent motion! How far removed from ours! With what effort must we tear ourselves from our worn and complicated passions, to comprehend the youth and divine simplicity of a being without reflection and form! How difficult is such a work for a modern man! How

impossible for an Englishman! Shelley, Keats approached it,—thanks to the nervous delicacy of their sickly or overflowing imagination; but how partial still was this approach! And how we feel, on reading them, that they would have needed the aid of public culture, and the aptitude of national genius, which Goethe possessed! That which the whole of civilisation has alone developed in the Englishman, is energetic will and practical faculties. Here man has braced himself up in his efforts, become concentrated in resistance, fond of action, and hence shut out from pure speculation, from wavering sympathy, and from disinterested art. In him metaphysical liberty has perished under utilitarian preoccupation, and pantheistic reverie under moral prejudices. How would he frame and bend his imagination so as to follow the numberless and fugitive outlines of existences, especially of vague existences? How would he leave his religion so as to reproduce indifferently the powers of indifferent nature? And who is further from flexibility and indifference than he? The flowing water, which in Goethe takes the mould of all the contours of the soil, and which we perceive in the sinuous and luminous distance beneath the golden mist which it exhales, was in Byron suddenly frozen into a mass of ice, and makes but a rigid block of crystal. Here, as elsewhere, there is but one character, the same as before. Men, gods, nature, all the changing and multiplex world of Goethe, has vanished. The poet alone subsists, as expressed in his character. Inevitably imprisoned within himself, he could see nothing but himself; if he must come to other existences, it is that they may reply to him; and through this pretended epic he persisted in his eternal monologue.

But how all these powers, assembled in a single being, make him great! Into what mediocrity and platitude sinks the *Faust* of Goethe, compared to *Manfred*! As soon as we cease to see humanity in this *Faust*, what does he become? Is he a hero? A sad hero, who has no other task but to speak, is afraid, studies the shades of his sensations, and walks about! His worst action is to seduce a grisette, and to go and dance by night in bad company—two exploits which many a German student has accomplished. His wilfulness is whim, his ideas are longings and dreams. A poet's soul in a scholar's head, both unfit for action, and not harmonising well together; discord within, and weakness without; in short, character is wanting: it is German all over. By his side, what a man is *Manfred*! He is a man; there is no fitter word, or one which could depict him better. He will not, at the sight of a spirit, "quake like a crawling, cowering, timorous worm." He will not regret that "he has neither land, nor pence, nor worldly honours, nor influence." He will not let himself be duped by the devil like a school-boy, or go and amuse himself like a cockney with the phantasmagoria of the Brocken. He has lived like a feudal chief, not like a scholar who has taken his degree; he has fought, mastered others; he knows how to master himself. If he has studied magic arts, it is not from an alchemist's curiosity, but from a spirit of revolt:

"From my youth upwards  
My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,  
Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;  
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,  
The aim of their existence was not mine;

My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers  
 Made me a stranger ; though I wore the form,  
 I had no sympathy with breathing flesh. . . .  
 My joy was in the Wilderness, to breathe  
 The difficult air of the iced mountain's top,  
 Where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing  
 Flit o'er the herbless granite, or to plunge  
 Into the torrent, and to roll along  
 On the swift whirl of the new breaking wave. . . .  
 To follow through the night the moving moon,  
 The stars and their development ; or catch  
 The dazzling lightnings till my eyes grew dim ;  
 Or to look, list'ning, on the scatter'd leaves,  
 While Autumn winds were at their evening song.  
 These were my pastimes, and to be alone ;  
 For if the beings, of whom I was one,—  
 Hating to be so,—cross'd me in my path,  
 I felt myself degraded back to them,  
 And was all clay again. . . .<sup>1</sup>  
 I could not tame my nature down ; for he  
 Must serve who fain would sway—and soothe—and sue—  
 And watch all time—and pry into all place—  
 And be a living lie—who would become  
 A mighty thing amongst the mean, and such  
 The mass are ; I disdain'd to mingle with  
 A herd, though to be leader—and of wolves. . . .<sup>2</sup>

He lives alone, and he cannot live alone. The deep  
 source of love, cut off from its natural issues, then over-  
 flows and lays waste the heart which refused to expand.  
 He has loved, too well, one too near to him, his sister it  
 may be ; she has died of it, and impotent remorse fills  
 the soul which no human occupation could satisfy :

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xi. ; *Manfred*, ii. 2, 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ; *Manfred*, iii. 1, 56.

“. . . My solitude is solitude no more,  
 But peopled with the Furies ;—I have gnash'd  
 My teeth in darkness till returning morn,  
 Then cursed myself till sunset ;—I have pray'd  
 For madness as a blessing—'tis denied me.  
 I have affronted death—but in the war  
 Of elements the waters shrunk from me,  
 And fatal things pass'd harmless—the cold hand  
 Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,  
 Back by a single hair, which would not break.  
 In fantasy, imagination, all  
 The affluence of my soul. . . . I plunged deep,  
 But, like an ebbing wave, it dashed me back  
 Into the gulf of my unfathom'd thought. . . .  
 I dwell in my despair,  
 And live, and live for ever.”<sup>1</sup>

He only wishes to see her once more : to this sole and all-powerful desire flow all the energies of his soul. He calls her up in the midst of spirits ; she appears, but answers not. He prays to her—with what cries, what doleful cries of deep anguish ! How he loves ! With what yearning and effort all his downtrodden and outcrushed tenderness gushes out and escapes at the sight of those well-beloved eyes, which he sees for the last time ! With what enthusiasm his convulsive arms are stretched towards that frail form which, shuddering, has quitted the tomb !—towards those cheeks in which the blood, forcibly recalled, plants “a strange hectic—like the unnatural red which Autumn plants upon the perish'd leaf.”

“. . . Hear me, hear me—  
 Astarte ! my beloved ! speak to me :

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xi. ; *Manfred*, ii. 2, 35.

I have so much endured—so much endure—  
Look on me ! the grave hath not changed thee more  
Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me  
Too much as I loved thee : we were not made  
To torture thus each other, though it were  
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.  
Say that thou loath'st me not—that I do bear  
This punishment for both—that thou wilt be  
One of the blessed—and that I shall die ;  
For hitherto all hateful things conspire  
To bind me in existence—in a life  
Which makes me shrink from immortality—  
A future like the past. I cannot rest.  
I know not what I ask, nor what I seek :  
I feel but what thou art—and what I am ;  
And I would hear yet once before I perish  
The voice which was my music—Speak to me !  
For I have call'd on thee in the still night,  
Startled the slumbering birds from the hush'd boughs,  
And woke the mountain wolves, and made the caves  
Acquainted with thy vainly echoed name,  
Which answer'd me—many things answer'd me—  
Spirits and men—but thou wert silent all . . .  
Speak to me ! I have wander'd o'er the earth,  
And never found thy likeness—Speak to me !  
Look on the fiends around—they feel for me :  
I fear them not, and feel for thee alone—  
Speak to me ! though it be in wrath ;—but say—  
I reckon not what—but let me hear thee once—  
This once—once more ! ”<sup>1</sup>

She speaks. What a sad and doubtful reply ! Manfred's limbs are convulsed when she disappears. But an instant after the spirits see that :

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xi. : *Manfred*, II. 4, 47.

" . . . He mastereth himself, and makes  
His torture tributary to his will.  
Had he been one of us, he would have made  
An awful spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Will is the unshaken basis of this soul. He did not bend before the chief of the spirits; he stood firm and calm before the infernal throne, whilst all the demons were raging who would tear him to pieces: now he dies, and they assail him, but he still strives and conquers:

" . . . Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;  
Thou never shalt possess me, *that* I know:  
What I have done is done; I bear within  
A torture which could nothing gain from thine;  
The mind which is immortal makes itself  
Requit for its good or evil thoughts—  
Is its own origin of ill and end—  
And its own place and time—its innate sense,  
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives  
No colour from the fleeting things without;  
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,  
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.  
*Thou* didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;  
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—  
But was my own destroyer, and will be  
My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!  
The hand of death is on me—but not yours!"<sup>2</sup>

This "I," the invincible I, who suffices to himself, on whom nothing has a hold, demons nor men, the sole author of his own good and ill, a sort of suffering or fallen god, but god always, even in its quivering flesh amidst his soiled and blighted destiny,—such is the hero and

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xi. ; *Manfred*, ii. 4, 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 4, 70.

the work of this mind, and of the men of his race. If Goethe was the poet of the *universe*, Byron was the poet of the *individual*; and if in one the German genius found its interpreter, the English genius found its interpreter in the other.

## V.

We can well imagine that Englishmen clamoured at and repudiated the monster. Southey, the poet-laureate, said of him, in good biblical style, that he savoured of Moloch and Belial—most of all of Satan; and, with the generosity of a brother poet, called the attention of Government to him. We should fill many pages if we were to copy the reproaches of the respectable reviews against these “men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations, who, forming a system of opinions to suit their own unhappy course of conduct, have rebelled against the holiest ordinances of human society, and, hating that revealed religion which, with all their efforts and bravadoes, they are unable entirely to disbelieve, labour to make others as miserable as themselves, by infecting them with a moral virus that eats into the soul.”<sup>1</sup> This sounds like the emphasis of an episcopal charge and of scholastic pedantry: in England the press does the duty of the police, and it never did it more violently than at that time. Opinion backed the press. Several times, in Italy, Lord Byron saw gentlemen leave a drawing-room with their wives, when he was announced. Owing to his title and celebrity, the scandal which he caused was more conspicuous than any other: he was a public sinner. One day an ob-

<sup>1</sup> Southey, Preface to *A Vision of Judgment*.



scure parson sent him a prayer which he had found amongst the papers of his wife—a charming and pious lady, recently dead, and who had secretly prayed to God for the conversion of the great sinner. Conservative and Protestant England, after a quarter of a century of moral wars, and two centuries of moral education, carried its severity and rigour to extremes; and Puritan intolerance, like Catholic intolerance previously in Spain, put recusants out of the pale of the law. The proscription of voluptuous or abandoned life, the narrow observation of order and decency, the respect of all police, human and divine; the necessary bows at the mere name of Pitt, of the king, the church, the God of the Bible; the attitude of the gentleman in a white tie, conventional, inflexible, implacable,—such were the customs then met with across the Channel, a hundred times more tyrannical than now-a-days: at that time, as Stendhal says, a peer at his fireside dared not cross his legs, for fear of its being improper. England held herself stiff, uncomfortably laced in her stays of decorum. Hence arose two sources of misery: a man suffers, and is tempted to throw down the ugly choking apparatus, when he is sure that it can be done secretly. On one side constraint, on the other hypocrisy—these are the two vices of English civilisation; and it was these which Byron, with his poet's discernment and his combative instincts, attacked.

He had seen them from the first; true artists are perspicacious: it is in this that they outstrip us; we judge from hearsay and formulas, like cockneys; they, like eccentric beings, from accomplished facts, and things: at twenty-two he perceived the tedium born of constraint desolating all high life:

"There stands the noble hostess, nor shall sink  
 With the three-thousandth curtsy ; . . .  
 Saloon, room, hall, o'erflow beyond their brink,  
 And long the latest of arrivals halts,  
 'Midst royal dukes and dames condemn'd to climb,  
 And gain an inch of staircase at a time."<sup>1</sup>

He wrote also :

"He (the Count) ought to have been in the country during the hunting season, with 'a select party of distinguished guests,' as the papers term it. He ought to have seen the gentleman after dinner (on the hunting days), and the soirée ensuing thereupon,—and the women looking as if they had hunted, or rather been hunted ; and I could have wished that he had been at a dinner in town, which I recollect at Lord C \* \* 's—small, but select, and composed of the most amusing people. The dessert was hardly on the table, when, out of twelve, I counted five asleep."<sup>2</sup>

As for the morals of the upper classes, this is what he says :

"Went to my box at Covent Garden to-night. . . . Casting my eyes round the house, in the next box to me, and the next, and the next, were the most distinguished old and young Babylonians of quality. . . . It was as if the house had been divided between your public and your understood courtesans ; —but the intrigantes much outnumbered the regular mercenaries. Now, where lay the difference between Pauline and her mother, . . . and Lady \* \* and daughter ? except that the two last may enter Carlton and any other house, and the two first are limited to the Opera and b—house. How I do delight in observing life as it really is !—and myself, after all, the worst of any !"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xvii. ; *Don Juan*, c. 11, st. lxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 18 ; Letter 512, April 5, 1823.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 308 ; *Journal* Dec. 17, 1813.

Decorum and debauchery; moral hypocrites, "qui mettent leurs vertus en mettant leurs gants blancs;"<sup>1</sup> an oligarchy which, to preserve its places and its sinecures, ravages Europe, preys on Ireland, and excites the people by making use of the grand words, virtue, Christianity, and liberty: there was truth in all these invectives.<sup>2</sup> It is only thirty years since the ascendancy of the middle class diminished the privileges and corruptions of the great; but at that time hard words could with justice be thrown at their heads. Byron said, quoting from Voltaire:

"'La Pudeur s'est enfuie des cœurs, et s'est réfugiée sur les lèvres.' . . . 'Plus les mœurs sont dépravées, plus les expressions deviennent mesurées; on croit regagner en langage ce qu'on a perdu en vertu.' This is the real fact, as applicable to the degraded and hypocritical mass which leavens the present English generation; and it is the only answer they deserve. . . . *Cant* is the crying sin of this double-dealing and false-speaking time of selfish spoilers."<sup>3</sup>

And then he wrote his masterpiece, *Don Juan*.<sup>4</sup>

All here was new, form as well as substance; for he had entered into a new world. The Englishman, the Northman, transplanted amongst southern manners and into Italian life, had become imbued with a new sap, which made him bear new fruit. He had been induced to read<sup>5</sup> the rather free satires of Buratti, and the

<sup>1</sup> Alfred de Musset.

<sup>2</sup> See his terrible satirical poem, *The Vision of Judgment*, against Southey, George IV., and official pomp.

<sup>3</sup> Byron's Works, xvi. 181; Preface to *Don Juan*, cantos vi. vii. and viii.

<sup>4</sup> *Don Juan* is a satire on the abuses in the present state of society, and not a eulogy of vice.

<sup>5</sup> Stendhal, *Mémoires sur Lord Byron*.





*THOMAS MOORE*



more than voluptuous sonnets of Baffo. He lived in the happy Venetian society, still exempt from political animosities, where care seemed a folly, where life was looked upon as a carnival, pleasure displayed itself openly, not timid and hypocritical, but loosely arrayed and commended. He amused himself here, impetuously at first, more than sufficient, even more than too much, and almost killed himself by these amusements; but after vulgar gallantries, having felt a real feeling of love, he became a *cavalier servente*, after the fashion of the country where he dwelt, with the consent of the family of the lady, offering his arm, carrying her shawl, a little awkwardly at first, and wonderingly, but on the whole happier than he had ever been, and fanned by a warm breath of pleasure and *abandon*. He saw in Italy the overthrow of all English morality, conjugal infidelity established as a rule, amorous fidelity raised to a duty: "There is no convincing a woman here that she is in the smallest degree deviating from the rule of right or the fitness of things in having an *amoroso*.<sup>1</sup> . . . Love (the sentiment of love) is not merely an excuse for it, but makes it an actual virtue, provided it is disinterested, and not a caprice, and is confined to one object."<sup>2</sup> A little later he translated the *Morgante Maggiore* of Pulci, to show "What was permitted in a Catholic country and a bigoted age to a churchman on the score of religion, and to silence those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the Liturgy."<sup>3</sup> He rejoiced in this liberty and this ease, and resolved never to fall again under the pedantic inquisition, which in his country had condemned and

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, iii. 333; Letter to Murray, Venice, Jan. 2, 1817.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 363; Letter to Moore, Venice, March 25, 1817.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 279; Letter to Murray, Ravenna, Feb. 7, 1820.



damned him past forgiveness. He wrote his *Beppo* like an improvisatore, with a charming freedom, a flowing and fantastic lightness of mood, and contrasted in it the recklessness and happiness of Italy with the prejudices and repulsiveness of England :

“I like . . . to see the Sun set, sure he'll rise to-morrow,  
Not through a misty morning twinkling weak as  
A drunken man's dead eye in maudlin sorrow,  
But with all Heaven t' himself ; that day will break as  
Beauteous as cloudless, nor be forced to borrow  
That sort of farthing candlelight which glimmers  
Where reeking London's smoky caldron simmers.

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,  
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,  
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,  
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South,  
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,  
That not a single accent seems uncouth,  
Like our harsh northern whistling, grunting guttural,  
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all.

I like the women too (forgive my folly),  
From the rich peasant cheek of ruddy bronze,  
And large black eyes that flash on you a volley  
Of rays that say a thousand things at once,  
To the high dama's brow, more melancholy,  
But clear, and with a wild and liquid glance,  
Heart on her lips, and soul within her eyes,  
Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies.”<sup>1</sup>

With other manners there existed in Italy another morality ; there is one for every age, race, and sky—I mean that the ideal model varies with the circumstances

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, vi. ; *Beppo*, c. xliii.-xlv. 121.

which fashion it. In England the severity of the climate, the warlike energy of the race, and the liberty of the institutions prescribe an active life, severe manners, Puritanic religion, the marriage tie strictly kept, a feeling of duty and self-command. In Italy the beauty of the climate, the innate sense of the beautiful, and the despotism of the government induced an idle life, loose manners, imaginative religion, the culture of the arts, and the search after happiness. Each model has its beauties and its blots,—the epicurean artist like the political moralist;<sup>1</sup> each shows by its greatnesses the littlenesses of the other, and, to set in relief the disadvantages of the second, Lord Byron had only to set in relief the seductions of the first.

Thereupon he went in search of a hero, and did not find one, which, in this age of heroes, is “an uncommon want.” For lack of a better he chose “our ancient friend Don Juan,”—a scandalous choice: what an outcry the English moralists will make! But, to cap the horror, this Don Juan is not wicked, selfish, odious, like his fellows; he does not seduce, he is no corrupter. When an opportunity arises, he lets himself drift; he has a heart and senses, and, under a beautiful sun, they are easily touched: at sixteen a youth cannot help himself, nor at twenty, nor perhaps at thirty. Lay it to the charge of human nature, my dear moralists; it is not I who made it as it is. If you will grumble, address yourselves higher: we are here as painters, not as makers of human puppets, and we do not answer for the inner structure of our dancing-dolls. Our Don Juan

<sup>1</sup> See Stendhal, *Vie de Giacomo Rossini*, and Dean Stanley's *Life of Dr. Arnold*. The contrast is complete. See also Mad. de Stael's *Corinne*, where this opposition is very clearly grasped.

is now going about; he goes about in many places, and in all he is young; we will not launch thunderbolts on his head because he is young; that fashion is past: the green devils and their capers only come on the stage in the last act of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. And, moreover, Juan is so amiable! After all, what has he done that others don't do? He has been a lover of Catherine II., but he only followed the lead of the diplomatic corps and the whole Russian army. Let him sow his wild oats; the good grain will spring up in its time. Once in England, he will behave himself decently. I confess that he may even there, when provoked, go a gleanng in the conjugal gardens of the aristocracy; but in the end he will settle, go and pronounce moral speeches in Parliament, become a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. If you wish absolutely to have him punished, we will "make him end in hell, or in an unhappy marriage, not knowing which would be the severest: the Spanish tradition says hell: but it is probably only an allegory of the other state."<sup>1</sup> At all events, married or damned, the good folk at the end of the piece will have the pleasure of knowing that he is burning all alive.

Is not this a singular apology? Does it not aggravate the fault? Let us wait; we know not yet the whole venom of the book: together with Juan there are Donna Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz, Dudu, and many more. It is here the diabolical poet digs in his sharpest claw, and he takes care to dig it into our weakest side. What will the clergymen and white-chokered reviewers say? For, to speak the truth, there is no

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, v. 127; Letter to Mr. Murray, Ravenna, Feb. 16, 1821.

preventing it: we must read on, in spite of ourselves. Twice or three times following we meet here with *happiness*; and when I say happiness, I mean profound and complete happiness—not mere voluptuousness, not obscene gaiety; we are far removed from the nicely-written ribaldry of Dorat, and the unbridled license of Rochester. Beauty is here, southern beauty, resplendent and harmonious, spread over everything, over the luminous sky, the calm scenery, corporal nudity, artlessness of heart. Is there a thing it does not deify? All sentiments are exalted under its hands. What was gross becomes noble; even in the nocturnal adventure in the seraglio, which seems worthy of Faublas, poetry embellishes licentiousness. The girls are lying in the large silent apartment, like precious flowers brought from all climates into a conservatory:

“One with her flush’d cheek laid on her white arm,  
And raven ringlets gather’d in dark crowd  
Above her brow, lay dreaming soft and warm; . . .  
One with her auburn tresses lightly bound,  
And fair brows gently drooping, as the fruit  
Nods from the tree, was slumbering with soft breath,  
And lips apart, which show’d the pearls beneath. . . .  
A fourth as marble, statue-like and still,  
Lay in a breathless, hush’d, and stony sleep;  
White, cold, and pure . . . a carved lady on a monument.”<sup>1</sup>

However, “the fading lamps waned dim and blue;”  
Dudu is asleep, the innocent girl; and if she has cast  
a glance on her glass,

“’Twas like the fawn, which, in the lake display’d,  
Beholds her own shy, shadowy image pass,

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xvi. ; *Don Juan*, c. vi. st. lxi. lxxviii.

When first she starts, and then returns to peep,  
Admiring this new native of the deep."<sup>1</sup>

What will become now of Puritanic prudery? Can the proprieties prevent beauty from being beautiful? Will you condemn a picture of Titian for its nudity? What gives value to human life, and nobility to human nature, if not the power of attaining delicious and sublime emotions? We have just had one—one worthy of a painter; is it not worth that of an alderman? Shall we refuse to acknowledge the divine because it appears in art and enjoyment, and not only in conscience and action? There is a world beside ours, and a civilisation beside ours; our rules are narrow, and our pedantry tyrannic; the human plant can be otherwise developed than in our compartments and under our snows, and the fruits it will then bear will not be less precious. We must confess it, since we relish them when they are offered to us. Who has read the love of Haidée, and has had any other thought than to envy and pity her? She is a wild child who has picked up Juan—another child cast ashore senseless by the waves. She has preserved him, nursed him like a mother, and now she loves him: who can blame her for loving him? Who, in presence of the splendid nature which smiles on and protects them, can imagine for them anything else than the all-powerful feeling which unites them:

“It was a wild and breaker-beaten coast,  
With cliffs above, and a broad sandy shore,  
Guarded by shoals and rocks as by an host, . . .  
And rarely ceased the haughty billow's roar,  
Save on the dead long summer days, which make  
The outstretch'd ocean glitter like a lake. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, *Don Juan*, c. vi. st. lx.

And all was stillness, save the sea-bird's cry,  
 And dolphin's leap, and little billow crost  
 By some low rock or shelve, that made it fret  
 Against the boundary it scarcely wet. . . .

And thus they wander'd forth, and hand in hand,  
 Over the shining pebbles and the shells,  
 Glided along the smooth and harden'd sand,  
 And in the worn and wild receptacles  
 Work'd by the storms, yet work'd as it were plann'd,  
 In hollow halls, with sparry roofs and cells,  
 They turn'd to rest ; and, each clasp'd by an arm,  
 Yielded to the deep twilight's purple charm.

They look'd up to the sky whose floating glow  
 Spread like a rosy ocean, vast and bright ;  
 They gazed upon the glittering sea below,  
 Whence the broad moon rose circling into sight ;  
 They heard the wave's splash and the wind so low,  
 And saw each other's dark eyes darting light  
 Into each other—and, beholding this,  
 Their lips drew near, and clung into a kiss. . . .

They were alone, but not alone as they  
 Who shut in chambers think it loneliness ;  
 The silent ocean, and the starlight bay  
 The twilight glow, which momentarily grew less,  
 The voiceless sand, and dropping caves that lay  
 Around them, made them to each other press,  
 As if there were no life beneath the sky  
 Save theirs, and that their life could never die.”<sup>1</sup>

An excellent opportunity to introduce here your formularies and catechisms :

“ Haidée spoke not of scruples, ask'd no vows,  
 Nor offer'd any . . .

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xv. ; *Don Juan*, c. ii. st. clxxxvii-clxxxviii.

She was all which pure ignorance allows,  
And flew to her young mate like a young bird."<sup>1</sup>

Nature suddenly expands, for she is ripe, like a bud bursting into bloom, nature in her fulness, instinct, and heart:

"Alas! they were so young, so beautiful,  
So lonely, loving helpless, and the hour  
Was that in which the heart is always full,  
And, having o'er itself no further power,  
Prompts deeds eternity can not annul."<sup>2</sup> . . .

O admirable moralists, you stand before these two flowers like patented gardeners, holding in your hands a model of the bloom sanctioned by your society of horticulture, proving that the model has not been followed, and deciding that the two weeds must be cast into the fire, which you keep burning to consume irregular growths. You have judged well, and you know your art.

Besides British cant, there is universal hypocrisy; besides English pedantry, Byron wars against human roguery. Here is the general aim of the poem, and to this his character and genius tended. His great and gloomy dreams of juvenile imagination have vanished; experience has come; he knows man now; and what is man, once known? does the sublime abound in him? Do we think that the grand sentiments—those of Childe Harold, for instance,—are the ordinary course of life?<sup>3</sup> The truth is, that man employs most of his time

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xv. ; *Don Juan*, c. ii. st. cxc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. ii. st. cxcii.

<sup>3</sup> Byron says (v., Oct. 12, 1820), "Don Juan is too true, and would, I suspect, live longer than Childe Harold. The women hate many things which strip off the tinsel of sentiment."

in sleeping, dining, yawning, working like a horse, amusing himself like an ape. According to Byron, he is an animal; except for a few minutes, his nerves, his blood, his instincts lead him. Routine works over it all, necessity whips him on, the animal advances. As the animal is proud, and moreover imaginative, it pretends to be marching for its own pleasure, that there is no whip, that at all events this whip rarely touches its flanks, that at least its stoic back can make-believe that it does not feel it. It thinks that it is decked with the most splendid trappings, and thus struts on with measured steps, fancying that it carries relics and treads on carpets and flowers, whilst in reality it tramples in the mud, and carries with it the stains and bad smells of every dunghill. What a pastime to touch its mangy back, to set before its eyes the sacks full of flower which it carries, and the goad which makes it go!<sup>1</sup> What a pretty farce! It is the eternal farce; and not a sentiment thereof but provides him with an act: love in the first place. Certainly Donna Julia is very lovable, and Byron loves her; but she comes out of his hands, as rumbled as any other woman. She is virtuous, of course; and what is better still, she desires to be so. She plies herself, in connection with Don Juan, with the finest arguments; what a fine thing are arguments, and how suited they are to check passion! Nothing can be more solid than a firm purpose, propped up by logic, resting on the fear of the world, the thought of God, the recollection of duty; nothing can prevail against it, except a *lêve-à-lêve* in June, on a moonlight evening.

<sup>1</sup> *Don Juan*, c. vii. st. 2. I hope it is no crime to laugh at *all* things. For I wish to know *what*, after *all*, are *all* things—but a *shuno*!



At last the deed is done, and the poor timid lady is surprised by her outraged husband; in what a situation! Let us look again at the book. Of course she will be speechless, ashamed and full of tears, and the moral reader duly reckons on her remorse. My dear reader, you have not reckoned on impulse and nerves. To-morrow she will feel shame; the business is now to overwhelm the husband, to deafen him, to confound him, to save Juan, to save herself, to fight. The war once begun, is waged with all kinds of weapons, and chiefly with audacity and insults. The only idea is the present need, and this absorbs all others; it is in this that woman is a woman. This Julia cries lustily. It is a regular storm: hard words and recriminations, mockery and challenges, fainting and tears. In a quarter of an hour she has gained twenty years' experience. You did not know, nor she either, what an actress can emerge, all on a sudden, unforeseen, out of a simple woman. Do you know what can emerge from yourself? You think yourself rational, humane; I admit it for to-day; you have dined, and you are comfortable in a pleasant room. Your human mechanism works without getting into disorder, because the wheels are oiled and well regulated; but place it in a shipwreck, a battle, let the failing or the plethora of blood for an instant derange the chief pieces, and we shall see you howling or drivelling like a madman or an idiot. Civilisation, education, reason, health, cloak us in their smooth and polished cases; let us tear them away one by one, or all together, and we laugh to see the brute, who is lying at the bottom. Here is our friend Juan reading Julia's last letter, and swearing in a transport never to forget the beautiful eyes which he caused to weep so

much. Was ever feeling more tender or sincere? But unfortunately Juan is at sea, and sickness sets in. He cries out:

"Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,  
Than I resign thine image, oh, my fair! . . .  
(Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick.) . . .  
Sooner shall heaven kiss earth—(here he fell sicker.)  
Oh Julia! what is every other woe?  
(For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor;  
Pedro, Battista, help me down below).  
Julia, my love!—(You rascal, Pedro, quicker)—  
Oh, Julia!—(this curst vessel pitches so)  
Beloved Julia, hear me still beseeching!  
(Here he grew inarticulate with retching.) . . .  
Love's a capricious power . . .  
Against all noble maladies he's bold,  
But vulgar illnesses don't like to meet; . . .  
Shrinks from the application of hot towels,  
And purgatives are dangerous to his reign,  
Sea-sickness death."<sup>1</sup> . . .

Many other things cause the death of Love:

"'Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign  
Of human frailty, folly, also crime,  
That love and marriage rarely can combine,  
Although they both are born in the same clime;  
Marriage from love, like vinegar from wine—  
A sad, sour, sober beverage.<sup>2</sup> . . .  
An honest gentleman, at his return,  
May not have the good fortune of Ulysses; . . .  
The odds are that he finds a handsome urn  
To his memory—and two or three young misses  
Born to some friend, who holds his wife and riches,—  
And that his Argus bites him by—the breeches."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Byron's Works, xv. ; *Don Juan*, c. ii. st. xix-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. iii. st. v.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* c. iii. st. xxiii.

These are the words of a sceptic, even of a cynic. Sceptic and cynic, it is in this he ends. Sceptic through misanthropy, cynic through bravado, a sad and combative humour always impels him; southern voluptuousness has not conquered him; he is only an epicurean through contradiction and for a moment:

“Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,  
Sermons and soda-water the day after.  
Man, being reasonable must get drunk;  
The best of life is but intoxication.”<sup>1</sup>

We see clearly that he is always the same, going to extremes and unhappy, bent on destroying himself. His *Don Juan*, also, is a debauchery; in it he diverts himself outrageously at the expense of all respectable things, as a bull in a china shop. He is always violent, and often ferocious; a sombre imagination intersperses his love stories with horrors leisurely enjoyed, the despair and famine of shipwrecked men, and the emaciation of the raging skeletons feeding on each other. He laughs at it horribly, like Swift; he jests over it like Voltaire:

“And next they thought upon the master’s mate,  
As fattest; but he saved himself, because,  
Besides being much averse from such a fate,  
There were some other reasons: the first was,  
He had been rather indisposed of late;  
And that which chiefly proved his saving clause,  
Was a small present made to him at Cadiz,  
By general subscription of the ladies.”<sup>2</sup>

With his specimens in hand,<sup>3</sup> Byron follows with a surgeon’s exactness all the stages of death, gorging, rage,

<sup>1</sup> Byron’s Works, xv. ; *Don Juan*, c. ii. st. clxxviii., clxxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. ii. st. lxxxi.

<sup>3</sup> Byron had before him a dozen authentic descriptions.

madness, howling, exhaustion, stupor; he wishes to touch and exhibit the naked and ascertained truth, the last grotesque and hideous element of humanity. Let us read again the assault on Ismail,—the grape-shot and the bayonet, the street massacres, the corpses used as fascines, and the thirty-eight thousand slaughtered Turks. There is blood enough to satiate a tiger, and this blood flows amidst an accompaniment of jests; it is in order to rail at war, and the butcheries dignified with the name of exploits. In this pitiless and universal demolition of all human vanities, what remains? What do we know except that life is “a scene of all-confess’d inanity,” and that men are,

“Dogs, or men!—for I flatter you in saying  
That ye are dogs—your betters far—ye may  
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying  
To show ye what ye are in every way!”<sup>1</sup>

What does he find in science but deficiencies, and in religion but mummeries?<sup>2</sup> Does he so much as preserve poetry? Of the divine mantle, the last garment which a poet respects, he makes a rag to trample upon, to wring, to make holes in, out of sheer wantonness. At the most touching moment of Haidée’s love he vents a buffoonery. He concludes an ode with caricatures. He is Faust in the first verse, and Mephistopheles in the second. He employs, in the midst of tenderness or of murder, penny-print witticisms, trivialities, gossip, with a pamphleteer’s vilification and a buffoon’s whimsicalities. He lays bare the poetic method, asks himself where he has got to, counts the stanzas already

<sup>1</sup> Byron’s Works, xvi. ; *Don Juan*, c. vii. st. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See his *Vision of Judgment*.

done, jokes the Muse, Pegasus, and the whole epic stud, as though he wouldn't give twopence for them. Again, what remains? Himself, he alone, standing amidst all this ruin. It is he who speaks here; his characters are but screens; half the time even he pushes them aside, to occupy the stage. He lavishes upon us his opinions, recollections, anger, tastes; his poem is a conversation, a confidence, with the ups and downs, the rudeness and freedom of a conversation and a confidence, almost like the holographic journal, in which, by night, at his writing-table, he opened his heart and discharged his feelings. Never was seen in such a clear glass the birth of lively thought, the tumult of great genius, the inner life of a genuine poet, always impassioned, inexhaustibly fertile and creative, in whom suddenly, successively, finished and adorned, bloomed all human emotions and ideas,—sad, gay, lofty, low, hustling one another, mutually impeding one another like swarms of insects who go humming and feeding on flowers and in the mud. He may say what he likes; willingly or unwillingly we listen to him; let him leap from sublime to burlesque, we leap with him. He has so much wit, so fresh a wit, so sudden, so biting, such a prodigality of knowledge, ideas, images picked up from the four corners of the horizon, in heaps and masses, that we are captivated, transported beyond all limits; we cannot dream of resisting. Too vigorous, and hence unbridled,—that is the word which ever recurs when we speak of Byron; too vigorous against others and himself, and so unbridled, that after spending his life in setting the world at defiance, and his poetry in depicting revolt, he can only find the fulfilment of his talent and the satisfaction of his heart, in a poem waging war

on all human and poetic conventions. When a man lives in such a manner he must be great, but he becomes also morbid. There is a malady of heart and mind in the style of *Don Juan*, as in Swift. When a man jests amidst his tears, it is because he has a poisoned imagination. This kind of laughter is a spasm, and we see in one man a hardening of the heart, or madness; in another, excitement or disgust. Byron was exhausted, at least the poet was exhausted in him. The last cantos of *Don Juan* drag: the gaiety became forced, the escapades became digressions; the reader began to be bored. A new kind of poetry, which he had attempted, had given way in his hands: in the drama he only attained to powerful declamation, his characters had no life; when he forsook poetry, poetry forsook him; he went to Greece in search of action, and only found death.

## VI.

So lived and so died this unhappy great man; the malady of the age had no more distinguished prey. Around him, like a hecatomb, lie the others, wounded also by the greatness of their faculties and their immoderate desires,—some ending in stupor or drunkenness, others worn out by pleasure or work; these driven to madness or suicide; those beaten down by impotence, or lying on a sick-bed; all agitated by their too acute or aching nerves; the strongest carrying their bleeding wound to old age, the happiest having suffered as much as the rest, and preserving their scars, though healed. The concert of their lamentations has filled their century, and we stood around them, hearing in our hearts the low echo of their cries. We were sad like them, and like

them inclined to revolt. The reign of democracy excited our ambitions without satisfying them; the proclamation of philosophy kindled our curiosity without satisfying it. In this wide-open career, the plebeian, suffered for his mediocrity, and the sceptic for his doubt. The plebeian, like the sceptic, attacked by a precocious melancholy, and withered by a premature experience, abandoned his sympathies and his conduct to the poets, who declared happiness impossible, truth unattainable, society ill-arranged, man abortive or marred. From this unison of voices an idea arose, the centre of the literature, the arts, the religion of the age, to wit that there is a monstrous disproportion between the different parts of our social structure, and that human destiny is vitiated by this disagreement.

What advice have they given us to cure this? They were great; were they wise? "Let deep and strong sensations rain upon you; if the human mechanism breaks, so much the worse!" "Cultivate your garden, bury yourself in a little circle, re-enter the flock, be a beast of burden." "Turn believer again, take holy water, abandon your mind to dogmas, and your conduct to manuals of devotion." "Make your way; aspire to power, honours, wealth." Such are the various replies of artists and citizens, Christians and men of the world. Are they replies? And what do they propose but to satiate one's self, to become stupid, to turn aside, to forget? There is another and a deeper answer, which Goethe was the first to give, the truth of which we begin to conceive, in which issue all the labour and experience of the age, and which may perhaps be the subject-matter of future literature: "Try to understand yourself, and things in general." A strange reply, which seems

hardly new, whose scope we shall only hereafter discover. For a long time yet men will feel their sympathies thrill at the sound of the sobs of their great poets. For a long time they will rage against a destiny which opens to their aspirations the career of limitless space, to shatter them, within two steps of the goal, against a wretched post which they had not seen. For a long time they will bear like fetters the necessities which they ought to have embraced as laws. Our generation, like the preceding, has been tainted by the malady of the age, and will never more than half get rid of it. We shall arrive at truth, not at tranquillity. All we can heal at present is our intellect; we have no hold upon our feelings. But we have a right to conceive for others the hopes which we no longer entertain for ourselves, and to prepare for our descendants the happiness which we shall never enjoy. Brought up in a more wholesome air, they will have, mayhap, a wholesomer heart. The reformation of ideas ends by reforming the rest, and the light of the mind produces serenity of heart. Hitherto, in our judgments on men, we have taken for our masters the oracles and poets, and like them we have received for undoubted truths the noble dreams of our imagination and the imperious suggestions of our heart. We have bound ourselves to the partiality of religious divinations, and the inexactness of literary divinations, and we have shaped our doctrines according to our instincts and our vexations. Science at last approaches, and approaches man; it has gone beyond the visible and palpable world of stars, stones, plants, amongst which man disdainfully confined her. It reaches the heart provided with exact and penetrating implements, whose justness has been proved, and their



reach measured by three hundred years of experience. Thought, with its development and rank, its structure and relations, its deep material roots, its infinite growth through history, its lofty bloom at the summit of things, becomes the object of science,—an object which, sixty years ago, it foresaw in Germany, and which, slowly and surely probed, by the same methods as the physical world, will be transformed before our eyes, as the physical world has been transformed. It is already being transformed, and we have left behind us the light in which Byron and the French poets had considered it. No, man is not an abortion or a monster; no, the business of poetry is not to disgust or defame him. He is in his place, and completes a chain. Let us watch him grow and increase, and we shall cease to rail at or curse him. He, like everything else, is a product, and as such it is right he should be what he is. His innate imperfection is in order, like the constant abortion of a stamen in a plant, like the fundamental irregularity of four facets in a crystal. What we took for a deformity, is a form; what seemed to us a subversion of a law, is the accomplishment of a law. Human reason and virtue have for their foundation instincts and animal images, as living forms have for their instruments physical laws, as organic matters have for their elements mineral substances. What wonder if virtue or human reason, like living form or organic matter, sometimes fails or decomposes, since like them, and like every superior and complex existence, they have for support and control inferior and simple forces, which, according to circumstances, now maintain it by their harmony, now mar it by their discord? What wonder if the elements of existence, like

those of quantity, receive, from their very nature, the immutable laws which constrain and reduce them to a certain species and order of formation? Who will rise up against geometry? Who, especially, will rise up against a living geometry? Who will not, on the contrary, feel moved with admiration at the sight of those grand powers which, situated at the heart of things, incessantly urge the blood through the limbs of the old world, disperse it quickly in the infinite network of arteries, and spread over the whole surface the eternal flower of youth and beauty? Who, finally, will not feel himself ennobled, when he finds that this pile of laws results in a regular series of forms, that matter has thought for its goal, that nature ends in reason, and that this ideal to which, amidst so many errors, all the aspirations of men cling, is also the end to which aim, amidst so many obstacles, all the forces of the universe? In this employment of science, and in this conception of things, there is a new art, a new morality, a new polity, a new religion, and it is in the present time our task to try and discover them.

## CHAPTER III.

### *The Past and the Present.*

#### § 1.

##### I.

HAVING reached the limits of this long review, we can now survey as a whole the aggregate of English civilisation: everything is connected there: a few primitive powers and circumstances have produced the rest, and we have only to pursue their continuous action in order to comprehend the nation and its history, its past and its present. At the beginning and far away in the region of causes, comes the race. A whole people, Angles and Saxons, destroyed, drove away, or enslaved the old inhabitants, wiped out the Roman culture, settled by themselves and unmixed, and, amongst the later Danish pirates, only encountered a new reinforcement of the same blood. This is the primitive stock: from its substance and innate properties is to spring almost the whole future growth. At this time and as they then were, alone in their island, the Angles and Saxons attained a development such as it was, rough, brutal, and yet solid. They ate and drank, built and cleared the land, and, in particular, multiplied: the scattered tribes who crossed the sea in leather boats, became a strong compact nation, —three hundred thousand families, rich, with store of

cattle, abundantly provided with corporal subsistence, partly at rest in the security of social life, with a king, respected and frequent assemblies, good judicial customs : here, amidst the fire and vehemence of barbarian temperament, the old Germanic fidelity held men together, whilst the old Germanic independence, held them upright. In all else they barely advanced. A few fragmentary songs, an epic in which still are to be found traces of the warlike excitement of ancient barbarism, gloomy hymns, a harsh and fierce poetry, sometimes sublime and always rude,—this is all that remains of them. In six centuries they had scarcely gone one step beyond the manners and sentiments of their uncivilised Germany : Christianity, which obtained a hold on them by the greatness of its biblical tragedies and the troubled sadness of its aspirations, did not bring to them a Latin civilisation : this remained outside, hardly accepted by a few great men, deformed, when it did enter, by the difference between the Roman and Saxon genius—always altered and reduced ; so much so, that for the men of the Continent these islanders were but illiterate dullards, drunkards, and gluttons ; at all events, savage and slow by mood and nature, rebellious against culture, and sluggish in development.

The empire of this world belongs to force. These people were conquered for ever and permanently,—conquered by Normans, that is, by Frenchmen more clever, more quickly cultivated and organised than they. This is the great event which was to complete their character, decide their history, and stamp upon character and history an impress of the political and practical spirit which separates them from other German nations. Oppressed, enclosed in the unyielding meshes

of Norman organisation, they were not destroyed although they were conquered, they were on their own soil, each with his friends and in his tithings; they formed a body; they were yet twenty times more numerous than their conquerors. Their situation and their necessities create their habits and their aptitudes. They endure, protest, struggle, resist together and unanimously; strive to-day, to-morrow, daily, not to be slain or plundered, to restore their old laws, to obtain or extort guarantees; and they gradually acquire patience, judgment, all the faculties and inclinations by which liberties are maintained and states are founded. By a singular good fortune, the Norman lords assist them in this; for the king has secured to himself so much, and is so formidable, that, in order to repress the great pillager, the lesser ones are forced to make use of their Saxon subjects, to ally themselves with them, to give them a share in their charters, to become their representatives, to admit them into Parliament, to leave them to labour freely, to grow rich, to acquire pride, strength, authority, to interfere with themselves in public affairs. Thus, then, gradually the English nation, struck down by the Conquest to the ground, as if with a mace, extricates and raises itself; five hundred years and more being occupied in this re-elevation. But, during all this time, leisure failed for refined and lofty culture: it was needful to live and defend themselves, to dig the ground, spin wool, practise the bow, attend public meetings, serve on juries, to contribute and argue for common interests: the important and respected man is he who knows how to fight well and to gain much money. It was the energetic and warlike manners which were developed, the active and positive spirit

which predominated ; learning and elegance were left to the Gallicised nobles of the court. When the valiant Saxon townsfolk quitted bow and plough, it was to feast copiously, or to sing the ballad of "Robin Hood." They lived and acted ; they did not reflect or write ; their national literature was reduced to fragments and rudiments, harpers' songs, tavern epics, a religious poem, a few books on religious reformation. At the same time Norman literature faded ; separated from the stem, and on a foreign soil, it languished in imitations ; only one great poet, almost French in mind, quite French in style, appeared, and, after him, as before him, we find helpless drivel. For the second time, a civilisation of five centuries became sterile in great ideas and works ; this still more so than its neighbours, and for a twofold reason,—because to the universal impotence of the Middle-ages was added the impoverishment of the Conquest, and because of the two component literatures, one transplanted, became abortive, and the other, mutilated, ceased to expand.

## II.

But amongst so many attempts and trials a character was formed, and the rest was to spring from it. The barbarous age established on the soil a German race, phlegmatic and grave, capable of spiritual emotions and moral discipline. The feudal age imposed on this race habits of resistance and association, political and utilitarian prepossessions. Fancy a German from Hamburg or Bremen confined for five hundred years in the iron corslet of William the Conqueror : these two natures, one innate, the other acquired,

constitute all the springs of his conduct. So it was in other nations. Like runners drawn up in line at the entrance of the arena, we see at the epoch of the Renaissance the five great peoples of Europe start, though we are unable at first to foresee anything of their career. At first sight it seems as if accidents or circumstances will alone regulate their speed, their fall, and their success. It is not so : from themselves alone their history depends : each nation will be the artisan of its fortune ; chance has no influence over events so vast ; and it is national tendencies and faculties which, overturning or raising obstacles, will lead them, according to their fate, each one to its goal,— some to the extreme of decadence, others to the height of prosperity. After all, man is ever his own master and his own slave. At the outset of every age he in a certain fashion *is* : his body, heart, mind have a distinct structure and disposition : and from this lasting arrangement, which all preceding centuries have contributed to consolidate or to construct, spring permanent desires or aptitudes, by which he determines and acts. Thus is formed in him the ideal model, which, whether obscure or distinct, complete or rough-hewn, will henceforth float before his eyes, rally all his aspirations, efforts, forces, and will cause him to aim for centuries at one effect, until at length, renewed by impotence or success, he conceives a new goal, and assumes new energy. The Catholic and enthusiastic Spaniard figures life like the Crusaders, lovers, knights, and abandoning labour, liberty, and science, casts himself, in the wake of the inquisition, and his king, into fanatical war, romanesque slothfulness, superstitious and impassioned obedience, voluntary and incurable ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the *Travels of Madame d'Aulnay in Spain*, at the end of the







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The theological and feudal German settles in his district docilely and faithfully under his petty chief, through natural patience and hereditary loyalty, engrossed by his wife and household, content to have conquered religious liberty, clogged by the dulness of his temperament in gross physical existence, and in sluggish respect for established order. The Italian, the most richly gifted and precocious of all, but, of all, the most incapable of voluntary discipline and moral austerity, turns towards the fine arts and voluptuousness, declines, deteriorates beneath foreign rule, takes life at its easiest, forgetting to think, and satisfied to enjoy. The sociable and levelling Frenchman rallies round his king, who secures for him public peace, external glory, the splendid display of a sumptuous court, a regular administration, a uniform discipline, a predominating influence in Europe, and universal literature. So, if we look at the Englishman in the sixteenth century, we shall find in him the inclinations and the powers which for three centuries are to govern his culture and shape his constitution. In this European expansion of natural existence and pagan literature we find at first in Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, and the tragic poets, in Spenser, Sidney, and the lyric poets, the national features, all with incomparable depth and splendour, and such as race and history have impressed and implanted in them for a thousand years. Not in vain did invasion settle here so serious a race, capable of reflection. Not in vain did the Conquest turn this race toward seventeenth century. Nothing is more striking than this revolution, if we compare it with the times before Ferdinand the Catholic, namely, the reign of Henry IV., the great power of the nobles, and the independence of the towns. Read about this history, Buckle's *History of Civilisation*, 1867, 3 vols., ii. ch. viii.

warlike life and practical preoccupations. From the first rise of original invention, its work displays the tragic energy, the intense and disorderly passion, the disdain of regularity, the knowledge of the real, the sentiment of inner things, the natural melancholy, the anxious divination of the obscure beyond,—all the instincts which, forcing man upon himself, and concentrating him within himself, prepare him for Protestantism and combat. What is this Protestantism which establishes itself? What is this ideal model which it presents; and what original conception is to furnish to this people its permanent and dominant poem? The harshest and most practical of all,—that of the Puritans, which, neglecting speculation, falls back upon action, encloses human life in a rigid discipline, imposes on the soul continuous efforts, prescribes to society a cloistral austerity, forbids pleasure, commands action, exacts sacrifice, and forms a moralist, a labourer, a citizen. Thus is it implanted, the great English idea—I mean the conviction that man is before all a free and moral personage, and that, having conceived alone in his conscience and before God the rule of his conduct, he must employ himself entirely in applying it within himself, beyond himself, obstinately, inflexibly, by offering a perpetual resistance to others, and imposing a perpetual restraint upon himself. In vain will this idea at first bring discredit upon itself by its transports and its tyranny; weakened by practice, it will gradually accommodate itself to humanity, and, carried from Puritan fanaticism to laic morality, it will win all public sympathy, because it answers to all the national instincts. In vain it will vanish from high society, under the scorn of the Restora-

tion, and the importation of French culture ; it subsists underground. For French culture did not come to a head in England : on this too alien soil it produced only unhealthy, coarse, or imperfect fruit. Refined elegance became low debauchery ; hardly expressed doubt became brutal atheism ; tragedy failed, and was but declamation ; comedy grew shameless, and was but a school of vice ; of this literature, there remained only studies of close reasoning and good style ; it was driven from the public stage, together with the Stuarts, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and liberal and moral maxims resumed the ascendancy, which they will not again lose. For, with ideas, events have followed their course : national inclinations have done their work in society as in literature ; and the English instincts have transformed the constitution and politics at the same time as the talents and minds. These rich tithings, these valiant yeomen, these rude, well-armed citizens, well fed, protected by their juries, wont to reckon on themselves, obstinate, combative, sensible, such as the English Middle-ages bequeathed them to modern England, did not object if the king practised his temporary tyranny on the classes above them, and oppressed the nobility with a rigorous, despotism which the recollection of the Civil Wars and the danger of high treason justified. But Henry VIII., and Elizabeth herself were obliged to follow in great interests the current of public opinion : if they were strong, it was because they were popular ; the people only supported their designs, and authorised their violences, because they found in them defenders of their religion, and the protectors of their labour.<sup>1</sup> The people themselves

<sup>1</sup> Buckle, *History of Civilisation*, i. ch. vii.

became immersed in this religion, and, from under a State-church, attained to personal belief. They grew rich by toil, and under the first Stuart already occupied the highest place in the nation. At this moment everything was decided: whatever happened, they must one day become masters. Social situations create political situations; legal constitutions always accommodate themselves to real things; and acquired preponderance infallibly results in written rights. Men so numerous, so active, so resolute, so capable of keeping themselves, so disposed to educe their opinions from their own reflection, and their subsistence from their own efforts, will under all circumstances seize the guarantees which they need. At the first onset, and in the ardour of primitive faith, they overturn the throne, and the current which bears them is so strong, that, in spite of their excess and their failure, the Revolution is accomplished by the abolition of feudal tenures, and the institution of *Habeas Corpus* under Charles II.; by the universal upheaving of the liberal and Protestant spirit, under James II.; by the establishment of the constitution, the act of toleration, the freedom of the press, under William III. From that moment England had found her proper place; her two interior and hereditary forces—moral and religious instinct, practical and political aptitude—had done their work, and were henceforth to build, without impediment or destruction, on the foundation which they had laid.

### III.

Thus was the literature of the eighteenth century born, altogether conservative, useful, moral, and limited.

Two powers direct it, one European, the other English : on one side a talent of oratorical analysis and habits of literary dignity, which belong to a classical age ; on the other, a taste for application and an energy of precise observation, which are peculiar to the national mind. Hence that excellence and originality of political satire, parliamentary discourse, solid essays, moral novels, and all kinds of literature which demand an attentive good sense, a correct good style, and a talent for advising, convincing, or wounding others. Hence that weakness or impotence of speculative thought, of genuine poetry, of original drama, and of all the kinds which require a grand, free curiosity, or a grand, disinterested imagination. The English did not attain complete elegance, nor superior philosophy ; they dulled the French refinements which they copied, and were terrified by the French boldness which they suggested ; they remained half cockneys and half barbarians ; they only invented insular ideas and English ameliorations, and were confirmed in their respect for their constitution and their tradition. But, at the same time, they cultivated and reformed themselves : their wealth and comfort increased enormously ; literature and opinion became severe and even intolerant ; their long war against the French Revolution caused their morality to become strict and even immoderate ; whilst the invention of machinery developed their comfort and prosperity a hundredfold. A salutary and despotic code of approved maxims, established proprieties, and unassailable beliefs, which fortifies, strengthens, curbs, and employs man usefully and painfully, without permitting him ever to deviate or grow weak ; a minute apparatus, and an



admirable provision of commodious inventions, associations, institutions, mechanisms, implements, methods, which incessantly co-operate to furnish body and mind with all which they need,—such are henceforth the leading and special features of this people. To constrain themselves and to provide for themselves, to govern themselves and nature, to consider life as moralists and economists, like a close garment, in which people must walk becomingly, and like a good garment, the best to be had, to be at once respectable and comfortable : these two words embrace all the main-springs of English actions. Against this limited good sense, and this pedantic austerity, a revolt broke out. With the universal renewal of thought and imagination, the deep poetic source, which flowed in the sixteenth century, seeks anew an outlet in the nineteenth, and a fresh literature springs up ; philosophy and history infiltrate their doctrines into the old establishment ; the greatest poet of the time shocks it incessantly with his curses and sarcasms ; from all sides, to this day, in science and letters, in practice and theory, in private and in public life, the most powerful minds endeavour to open up a new channel to the stream of continental ideas. But they are patriots as well as innovators, conservative as well as revolutionary ; if they touch religion and constitution, manners and doctrines, it is to widen, not to destroy them : England is made ; she knows it, and they know it. Such as this country is, based on the whole national history and on all the national instincts, it is more capable than any other people in Europe of transforming itself without recasting, and of devoting itself to its future without renouncing its past.

## § 2.

## I.

I began to perceive these ideas when I first landed in England, and I was singularly struck how they were corroborated by observation and history; it seemed to me that the present was completing the past, and the past explained the present.

At first the sea troubles and strikes a man with wonder; not in vain is a people insular and maritime, especially with such a sea and such coasts; their painters, not very gifted, perceive, in spite of all, its alarming and gloomy aspect; up to the eighteenth century, amidst the elegance of French culture, and under the joviality of Flemish tradition, we will find in Gainsborough the ineffaceable stamp of this great sentiment. In pleasant moments, in the fine calm summer days, the moist fog stretches over the horizon its pearl-grey veil; the sea has a pale slate colour; and the ships, spreading their canvas, advance patiently through the mist. But let us look around, and we will soon see the signs of daily peril. The coast is eaten out, the waves have encroached, the trees have vanished, the earth is softened by incessant showers, the ocean is here, ever intractable and fierce. It growls and bellows eternally, that old hoarse monster; and the barking pack of its waves advances like an endless army, before which all human force must give way. Think of the winter months, the storms, the long hours of the tempest-tossed sailor whirled about blindly by the squalls! Now, and in this fine season, over the whole circle of the horizon, rise the dull, wan, clouds, soon like the smoke of a coal-fire, some of a frail and dazzling

white, so swollen that they seem ready to burst. Their heavy masses creep slowly along; they are gorged, and already here and there on the limitless plain a patch of sky is shrouded in a sudden shower. After an instant, the sea becomes dirty and cadaverous; its waves leap with strange gambols, and their sides take an oily and livid tint. The vast grey dome drowns and hides the whole horizon; the rain falls, close and pitiless. We cannot have an idea of it, until we have seen it. When the southern men, the Romans, came here for the first time, they must have thought themselves in the infernal regions. The wide space between earth and sky, and on which our eyes dwell as their domain, suddenly fails; there is no more air, we see but a flowing mist. No more colours or forms. In this yellowish smoke, objects look like fading ghosts; nature seems a bad crayon-drawing, over which a child has awkwardly smeared his sleeve. Here we are at Newhaven, then at London; the sky disgorges rain, the earth returns her mist, the mist floats in the rain; all is swamped: looking round us, we see no reason why it should ever end. Here, truly, is Homer's Cimmerian land: our feet splash, we have no use left for our eyes; we feel all our organs stopped up, becoming rusty by the mounting damp; we think ourselves banished from the breathing world, reduced to the condition of marshy beings dwelling in dirty pools: to live here is not life. We ask ourselves if this vast town is not a cemetery, in which dabble busy and wretched ghosts. Amidst the deluge of moist soot, the muddy stream with its unwearying iron ships, like black insects which take on board and land shades, makes us think of the Styx. As there is no light, they create it. Lately, in a large

square in London, in the finest hotel, it was necessary to leave the gas alight for five days running. We become melancholy; we are disgusted with others and with ourselves. What can people do in this sepulchre? To remain at home without working is to gnaw one's vitals, and to prepare one's self for suicide. To go out is to make an effort, to care neither for damp nor cold, to brave discomfort and unpleasant sensations. Such a climate prescribes action, forbids sloth, develops energy, teaches patience. I was looking just now on the steam-boat at the sailors at the helm,—their tarpaulins, their great streaming boots, their sou'-westers, so attentive, so precise in their movements, so grave, so self-contained. I have since seen workmen at their looms,—calm, serious, silent, economising their efforts, and persevering all day, all the year, all their life, in the same regular and monotonous struggle of mind and body: their soul is suited to their climate. Indeed it must be so in order to live: after a week, we feel that here a man must renounce refined and heartfelt enjoyment, the happiness of careless life, complete idleness, the easy and harmonious expansion of artistic and animal nature; that here he must marry, bring up a house-full of children, assume the cares and importance of a family man, grow rich, provide against an evil day, surround himself with comfort, become a Protestant, a manufacturer, a politician; in short, capable of activity and resistance; and in all the ways open to men, endure and strive.

Yet there are charming and touching beauties here—those, to wit, of a well-watered land. When, on a partly clear day, we take a drive into the country and reach an eminence, our eyes experience a unique sensation, and a pleasure hitherto unknown. In the

far distance, wherever we look on the horizon, in the fields, on the hills, spreads the always visible verdure, plants for fodder and food, clover, hops; lovely meadows overflowing with high thick grass; here and there a cluster of lofty trees; pasture lands hemmed in with hedges, in which the heavy cows ruminates in peace. The mist rises insensibly between the trees, and in the distance float luminous vapours. There is nothing sweeter in the world, nor more delicate, than these tints; we might pause for hours together gazing on these pearly clouds, this fine aerial down, this soft transparent gauze which imprisons the rays of the sun, dulls them, and lets them reach the ground only to smile on it and to caress it. On both sides of our carriage pass before our eyes incessantly meadows each more lovely than the last, in which buttercups, meadow-sweet, Easter-daisies, are crowded in succession with their dissolving hues; a sweetness almost painful, a strange charm, breathes from this inexhaustible and transient vegetation. It is too fresh, it cannot last; nothing here is staid, stable and firm, as in the South; all is fleeting, springing up, or dying away, hovering betwixt tears and joy. The rolling water-drops shine on the leaves like pearls; the round tree-tops, the widespread foliage, whisper in the feeble breeze, and the sound of the falling tears left by the last shower never ceases. How well these plants thrive in the glades, spread out wantonly, ever renewed and watered by the moist air! How the sap mounts in these plants, refreshed and protected against the weather! And how sky and land seem made to guard their tissue and refresh their hues! At the least glimpse of sun they smile with delicious charm; we would call them

delicate and timid virgins under a veil about to be raised. Let the sun for an instant emerge, and we will see them grow resplendent as in a ball dress. The light falls in dazzling sheets; the lustrous golden petals shine with a too vivid colour; the most splendid embroideries, velvet starred with diamonds, sparkling silk seamed with pearls, are not to be compared to this deep hue; joy overflows like a brimming cup. In the strangeness and the rarity of this spectacle, we understand for the first time the life of a humid land. The water multiplies and softens the living tissues; plants increase, and have no substance: nourishment abounds, and has no savour; moisture fructifies, but the sun does not fertilise. Much grass, much cattle, much meat; large quantities of coarse food: thus an absorbing and phlegmatic temperament is supported; the human growth, like the animal and vegetable, is powerful, but heavy; man is amply but coarsely framed; the machine is solid, but it turns slowly on its hinges, and the hinges generally creak and are rusty. When we look at the people closer, it seems that their various parts are independent, at least that they need time to let sensations pass through them. Their ideas do not at first break out in passions, gestures, actions. As in the Fleming and the German, they dwell first of all in the brain; they expand there, they rest there; man is not shaken by them, he has no difficulty in remaining motionless, he is not rapt: he can act wisely, uniformly; for his inner motive power is an idea or a watchword, not an emotion or an attraction. He can bear tedium, or rather he does not weary himself; his ordinary course consists of dull sensations, and the insipid monotony of mechanical life has nothing which need repel him. He is accustomed

to it, his nature is suited for it. When a man has all his life eaten turnips, he does not wish for oranges. He will readily resign himself to hear fifteen consecutive discourses on the same subject, demanding for twenty years the same reform, compiling statistics, studying moral treatises, keeping Sunday schools, bringing up a dozen children. The piquant, the agreeable, are not a necessity to him. The weakness of his sensitive impulses contributes to the force of his moral impulses. His temperament makes him argumentative; he can get on without policemen; the shocks of man against man do not here end in explosions. He can discuss in the market-place aloud, religion and politics, hold meetings, form associations, rudely attack men in office, say that the Constitution is violated, predict the ruin of the State: there is no objection to this; his nerves are calm; he will argue without cutting throats; he will not raise revolutions; and perhaps he will obtain a reform. Observe the passers-by in the streets; in three hours we will see all the visible features of this temperament: light hair, in children almost white; pale eyes, often blue as Wedgwood-ware, red whiskers, a tall figure, the motions of an automaton; and with these other still more striking features, those which strong food and combative life have added to this temperament. Here the enormous guardsman, with rosy complexion, majestic, slightly bent, who struts along twirling a little cane in his hand, displaying his chest, and showing a clear parting between his pomaded hair; there the over-fed stout man, short, sanguine, like an animal fit for the shambles, with his startled, dazed, yet sluggish air; a little further on the country gentleman, six feet high, stout and tall, like the German who left his forest,

with the muzzle and nose of a bull-dog, tremendous savage-looking whiskers, rolling eyes, apoplectic face; these are the excesses of coarse blood and food; add to which, even in the women, the white front teeth of a carnivorous animal, and big feet solidly shod, excellent for walking in the mud. Again, look at the young men in a cricket match or picnic party; doubtless mind does not sparkle in their eyes, but life abounds there; there is something of decision and energy in their whole being; healthy and active, ready for motion, for enterprise, these are the words which rise involuntarily to our lips when we speak of them. Many look like fine, slender harriers, sniffing the air, and in full cry. A life passed in gymnastic exercises or in venturesome deeds is honoured in England; they must move their body, swim, throw the ball, run in the damp meadow, row, breathe in their boats the briny sea-vapour, feel on their foreheads the raindrops falling from the large oak trees, leap their horses over ditches and gates; the animal instincts are intact. They still relish natural pleasures; precocity has not spoiled them. Nothing can be simpler than the young English girls; amidst many beautiful things, there are few so beautiful in the world; slim, strong, self-assured, so fundamentally honest and loyal, so free from coquetry! A man cannot imagine, if he has not seen it, this freshness and innocence; many of them are flowers, expanded flowers; only a morning rose, with its transient and delicious colour, with its petals drenched in dew, can give us an idea of it; it leaves far behind the beauty of the South, and its precise, stable, finished contours, its well-defined outlines; here we perceive fragility, delicacy, the continual budding of life; candid



eyes, blue as periwinkles, looking at us without thinking of our look. At the least stirring of the soul, the blood rushes in purple waves into these girls' cheeks, neck, and shoulders; we see emotions pass over these transparent complexions, as the colours change in the meadows; and their modesty is so virginal and sincere, that we are tempted to lower our eyes from respect. And yet, natural and frank as they are, they are not languishing or dreamy; they love and endure exercise like their brothers; with flowing locks, at six years they ride on horseback and take long walks. Active life in this country strengthens the phlegmatic temperament, and the heart is kept more simple whilst the body grows healthier. Another observation: far above all these figures one type stands out, the most truly English, the most striking to a foreigner. Post yourself for an hour, early in the morning, at the terminus of a railway, and observe the men above thirty who come to London on business: the features are drawn, the faces pale, the eyes steady, preoccupied; the mouth open and, as it were, contracted; the man is tired, worn out, and hardened by too much work; he runs without looking round him. His whole existence is directed to a single end; he must incessantly exert himself to the utmost, practise the same exertion, a profitable one; he has become a machine. This is especially visible in workmen; perseverance, obstinacy, resignation, are depicted on their long bony and dull faces. It is still more visible in women of the lower orders: many are thin, consumptive, their eyes hollow, their nose sharp, their skin streaked with red patches; they have suffered too much, have had too many children, have a washed-out, or oppressed, or submissive, or stoically impassive air:

we feel that they have endured much, and can endure still more. Even in the middle or upper class this patience and sad hardening are frequent; we think when we see them of those poor beasts of burden, deformed by the harness, which remain motionless under the falling rain without thinking of shelter. Verily the battle of life is harsher and more obstinate here than elsewhere; whoever gives way, falls. Beneath the rigour of climate and competition, amidst the strikes of industry, the weak, the improvident, perish or are degraded; then comes gin and does its work; thence the long files of wretched women who sell themselves by night in the Strand to pay their rent; thence those shameful quarters of London, Liverpool, all the great towns, those spectres in tatters, gloomy or drunk, who crowd the dram-shops, who fill the streets with their dirty linen, and their rags hung out on ropes, who lie on a soot-heap, amidst troops of wan children; horrible shoals, whither descend all whom their wounded, idle, or feeble arms could not keep on the surface of the great stream. The chances of life are tragic here, and the punishment of improvidence cruel. We soon understand why, under this obligation to fight and grow hard, fine sensations disappear; why taste is blunted, how man becomes ungraceful and stiff; how discords, exaggerations, mar the costume and the fashion; why movements and forms become finally energetic and discordant, like the motions of a machine. If the man is German by race, temperament, and mind, he has been compelled in process of time to fortify, alter, altogether turn aside his original nature; he is no longer a primitive animal, but a well-trained animal; his body and mind have been transformed by strong

food, by bodily exercise, by austere religion, by public morality, by political strife, by perpetuity of effort ; he has become of all men the most capable of acting usefully and powerfully in all directions, the most productive and effectual labourer, as his ox has become the best animal for food, his sheep the best for wool, his horse the best for racing.

## II.

Indeed, there is no greater spectacle than his work ; in no age or amongst no nation on the earth, I believe, has matter ever been better handled and utilised. If we enter London by water, we see an accumulation of toil and work which has no equal on this planet. Paris, by comparison, is but an elegant city of pleasure ; the Seine, with its quays, a pretty serviceable plaything. Here all is vast. I have seen Marseilles, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, but I had no idea of such a mass. From Greenwich to London the two shores are a continuous wharf : merchandise is always being piled up, sacks hoisted, ships moored ; ever new warehouses for copper, beer, ropework, tar, chemicals. Docks, timber-yards, calking-basins, and shipbuilders' yards, multiply and encroach on each other. On the left there is the iron framework of a church being finished, to be sent to India. The Thames is a mile broad, and is but a populous street of vessels, a winding workyard. Steamboats, sailing vessels, ascend and descend, come to anchor in groups of two, three, ten, then in long files, then in dense rows ; there are five or six thousand of them at anchor. On the right, the docks, like so many intricate, maritime streets, disgorge or store up the vessels. If we get on a height,

we see vessels in the distance by hundreds and thousands, fixed as if on the land; their masts in a line, their slender rigging, make a spider-web which girdles the horizon. Yet on the river itself, towards the west, we see an inextricable forest of masts, yards, and cables; the ships are unloading, fastened to one another, mingled with chimneys, amongst the pulleys of the storehouses, cranes, capstans, and all the implements of the vast and ceaseless toil. A foggy smoke, penetrated by the sun, wraps them in its russet veil; it is the heavy and smoky air of a big hot-house; soil and man, light and air, all is transformed by work. If we enter one of these docks, the impression will be yet more overwhelming: each resembles a town; always ships, still more ships, in a line, showing their heads; their wide sides, their copper chests, like monstrous fishes under their breastplate of scales. When we are on the ground, we see that this breastplate is fifty feet high; many ships are of three thousand or four thousand tons. Clippers three hundred feet long are on the point of sailing for Australia, Ceylon, America. A bridge is raised by machinery; it weighs a hundred tons, and only one man is needed to raise it. Here are the wine stores—there are thirty thousands tuns of port in the cellars; here the place for hides, here for tallow, here for ice. The store for groceries extends as far as the eye can see, colossal, sombre as a picture by Rembrandt, filled with enormous vats, and crowded with many men, who move about in the flickering shade. The universe tends to this centre. Like a heart, to which blood flows, and from which it pours, money, goods, business arrive hither from the four quarters of the globe, and flow thence to the distant poles. And this circulation seems natural, so well is

it conducted. The cranes turn noiselessly; the tuns seem to move of themselves; a little car rolls them at once, and without effort; the bales descend by their own weight on the inclined planes, which lead them to their place. Clerks, without flurry, call out the numbers; men push or pull without confusion, calmly, husbanding their labour; whilst the stolid master, in his black hat, gravely, with spare gestures, and without one word, directs the whole.

Now let us take rail and go to Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, to see their industry. As we advance into the coal country, the air is darkened with smoke; the chimneys, high as obelisks, are in hundreds, and cover the plain as far as we can see; many and various rows of lofty buildings, in red monotonous brick, pass before our eyes, like files of economical and busy beehives. The blast-furnaces flame through the smoke; I counted sixteen in one group. The refuse of minerals is heaped up like mountains; the engines run like black ants, with monotonous and violent motion, and suddenly we find ourselves swallowed up in a monstrous town. This manufactory has five thousand hands, one mill 300,000 spindles. The Manchester warehouses are Babylonian edifices of six storeys high, and wide in proportion. In Liverpool there are 5000 ships along the Mersey, which choke one another up; more wait to enter. The docks are six miles long, and the cotton warehouses on the side extend their vast red rampart out of sight. All things here seem built in unmeasured proportions, and as though by colossal arms. We enter a mill; nothing but iron pillars, as thick as tree-trunks, cylinders as big as a man; locomotive shafts like vast oaks, notching machines which

send up iron chips, rollers which bend sheet-iron like paste, fly-wheels which become invisible by the swiftness of their revolution. Eight workmen, commanded by a kind of peaceful colossus, pushed into and pulled from the fire a tree of red-hot iron as big as my body. Coal has produced all this. England produces twice as much coal as the rest of the world. It has also brick, on account of the great schists, which are close to the surface; it has also estuaries filled by the sea, so as to make natural ports. Liverpool and Manchester, and about ten towns of 40,000 to 100,000 souls, are springing up in the basin of Lancashire. If we glance over a geological map we see whole parts shaded with black; they represent the Scotch, the North of England, the Midland, the Welsh, the Irish coal districts. The old antediluvian forests, accumulating here their fuel, have stored up the power which moves matter, and the sea furnishes the true road by which matter can be transported. Man himself, mind and body, seems created to make the most of these advantages. His muscles are firm, and his mind can support tedium. He is less subject to weariness and disgust than other men. He works as well in the tenth hour as in the first. No one handles machines better; he has their regularity and precision. Two workmen in a cotton-mill do the work of three, or even four, French workmen. Let us look now in the statistics how many leagues of stuffs they manufacture every year, how many millions of tons they export and import, how many tens of millions they produce and consume; let us add the industrial or commercial states they have founded, or are founding, in America, China, India, Australia; and then perhaps, reckoning men and money-value,—considering that their capital is seven or eight

times greater than that of France, that their population has doubled in fifty years, that their colonies, wherever the climate is healthy, are becoming new Englands, —we will obtain some notion, very slight, very imperfect, of a work whose magnitude the eyes alone can measure.

There remains yet one of its parts to explore, the cultivation of the land. From the railway carriage we see quite enough to understand it: a field with a hedge, then another field with another hedge, and so on: at times vast squares of turnips; all this well laid out, clean, glossy; no forests, here and there only a cluster of trees. The country is a great kitchen-garden—a manufactory of grass and meat. Nothing is left to nature and chance; all is calculated, regulated, arranged to produce and to bring in profits. If we look at the peasants, we find no genuine peasants; nothing like French peasants,—a sort of fellahs, akin to the soil, mistrustful and uncultivated, separated by a gulf from the townsmen. The countryman here is like an artisan; and, in fact, a field is a manufactory, with a farmer for the foreman. Proprietors and farmers, lavish their capital like great contractors. They drain the land, and have a rotation of crops; they have produced cattle, the richest in returns of any in the world; they have introduced steam-engines into cultivation, and into the rearing of cattle; they perfect already perfect stables. The greatest of the aristocracy take a pride in it; many country gentlemen have no other occupation. Prince Albert, near Windsor, had a model farm, and this farm brought in money. A few years ago the papers announced that the Queen had discovered a cure for the turkey-disease. Under this uni-

versal effort,<sup>1</sup> the products of agriculture have doubled in fifty years. In England, two and a half acres (*hectare*) receive eight or ten times more manure than the same number of French acres; though of inferior quality, the produce is double that of the French. Thirty persons are enough for this work, when in France forty would be required for half thereof. We come upon a farm, even a small one, say of a hundred acres; we find respectable, dignified, well-clad men, who express themselves clearly and sensibly; a large, wholesome, comfortable dwelling—often a little porch, with creepers—a well-kept garden, ornamental trees, the inner walls white-washed yearly, the floors washed weekly,—an almost Dutch cleanliness; therewith plenty of books—travels, treatises on agriculture, a few volumes of religion or history; and above all, the great family Bible. Even in the poorest cottages we find a few objects of comfort and recreation; a large cast-iron stove, a carpet, nearly always paper on the walls, one or two moral tales, and always the Bible. The cottage is clean; the habits are orderly; the plates, with their blue pattern, regularly arranged, look well above the shining dresser; the red floor-tiles have been swept; there are no broken or dirty panes; no doors off hinges, shutters unhung, stagnant pools, straggling dunghills, as amongst the French villagers; the little garden is kept free from weeds; frequently roses and honeysuckle round the door; and on Sunday we can see the father and mother, seated by a well-scrubbed table, with tea, bread and butter, enjoying their *home*, and the order they have established there. In France the peasant on Sunday leaves his hut to visit *his land*: what he aspires to is possession;

<sup>1</sup> Léonce de Lavergne *Economie rurale en Angleterre, passim*.



what Englishmen love is comfort. There is no land in which they demand more in this respect. An Englishman said to me, not very long ago: "Our great vice is the strong desire we feel for all good and comfortable things. We have too many wants, we spend too much. As soon as our peasants have a little money, they buy the best sherry and the best clothes they can get, instead of buying a bit of land."<sup>1</sup>

As we rise to the upper classes, this taste becomes stronger. In the middle ranks a man burdens himself with toil, to give his wife gaudy dresses, and to fill his house with the hundred thousand baubles of quasi-luxury. Higher still, the inventions of comfort are so multiplied that people are bored by them; there are too many newspapers and reviews on the table; too many kinds of carpets, washstands, matches, towels in the dressing-room; their refinement is endless; in thrusting our feet into slippers, we might imagine that twenty generations of inventors were required to bring sole and lining to this degree of perfection. We cannot conceive clubs better furnished with necessities and superfluities, houses so well arranged and managed, pleasure and abundance so cleverly understood, servants so reliable, respectful, handy. Servants in the last census were "the most numerous class of Her Majesty's subjects;" in England there are five where in France they have two. When I saw in Hyde Park the rich young ladies, the gentlemen riding or driving,

<sup>1</sup> De Foe was of the same opinion, and pretended that economy was not an English virtue, and that an Englishman can hardly live with twenty shillings a week, while a Dutchman with the same money becomes wealthy, and leaves his children very well off. An English labourer lives poor and wretchedly with nine shillings a week, whilst a Dutchman lives very comfortably with the same wages.



*DANIEL DEFOE*





when I thought of their country houses, their dress, their parks and stables, I said to myself that verily this people is constituted after the heart of economists : I mean, that it is the greatest producer and the greatest consumer in the world ; that none is more apt at squeezing out and absorbing the quintessence of things ; that it has developed its wants at the same time as its resources ; and we involuntarily think of those insects which, after their metamorphosis, are suddenly provided with teeth, feelers, unwearying claws, admirable and terrible instruments, fitted to dig, saw, build, do everything, but furnished also with incessant hunger and four stomachs.

### III.

How is this ant-hill governed ? As the train moves on, we perceive, amidst farms and tilled lands, the long wall of a park, the frontage of a castle, more generally of some vast ornate mansion, a sort of country town-house, of inferior architecture, Gothic or Italian pretensions, but surrounded by beautiful lawns, large trees scrupulously preserved. Here lives the rich *bourgeois* ; I am wrong, the word is false—I must say *gentleman* : *bourgeois* is a French word, and signifies the lazy *parvenus*, who devote themselves to rest, and take no part in public life ; here it is quite different ; the hundred or hundred and twenty thousand families, who spend a thousand and more annually, really govern the country. And this is no government imported, implanted artificially and from without ; it is a spontaneous and natural government. As soon as men wish to act together, they need leaders ; every association, voluntary or not, has one ; whatever it be, state, army, ship, or parish, it cannot do without a guide to

find the road, to take the lead, call the rest, scold the laggards. In vain we call ourselves independent; as soon as we march in a body, we need a leader; we look right and left expecting him to show himself. The great thing is to pick him out, to have the best, and not to follow another in his stead; it is a great advantage that there should be one, and that we should acknowledge him. These men, without popular election, or selection from government, find him ready made and recognised in the large landed proprietor, a man whose family has been long in the county, influential through his connections, dependents, tenantry, interested above all else by his great estates in the affairs of the neighbourhood, expert in directing these affairs which his family have managed for three generations, most fitted by education to give good advice, and by his influence to lead the common enterprise to a good result. Indeed, it is thus that things fall out; rich men leave London by hundreds every day to spend a day in the country; there is a meeting on the affairs of the county or of the church; they are magistrates, overseers, presidents of all kinds of societies, and this gratuitously. One has built a bridge at his own expense, another a chapel or a school; many establish public libraries, where books are lent out, with warmed and lighted rooms, in which the villagers in the evening can read the papers, play draughts, chess, and have tea at low charges,—in a word, simple amusements which may keep them from the public-house and gin-shop. Many of them give lectures; their sisters or daughters teach in Sunday schools; in fact, they provide for the ignorant and poor, at their own expense, justice, administration, civilisation. I know a very rich man, who in his Sunday school

taught singing to little girls. Lord Palmerston offered his park for archery meetings; the Duke of Marlborough opens his daily to the public, "requesting," this is the word used, "the public not to destroy the grass." A firm and proud sentiment of duty, a genuine public spirit, a noble idea of what a gentleman owes to himself, gives them a moral superiority which sanctions their command; probably from the time of the old Greek cities, no education or condition has been seen in which the innate nobility of man has received a more wholesome or completer development. In short, they are magistrates and patrons from their birth, leaders of the great enterprises in which capital is risked, promoters of all charities, all improvements, all reforms, and with the honours of command they accept its burdens. For observe, in contrast with the aristocracies of other countries, they are well educated, liberal, and march in the van, not in the rear of public civilisation. They are not drawing-room exquisites, like the French marquises of the eighteenth century: an English lord visits his fisheries, studies the system of liquid manures, speaks to the purpose about cheese; and his son is often a better rower, walker, and boxer than the farmers. They are not malcontents, like the French nobility, behind their age, devoted to whist, and regretting the middle-ages. They have travelled through Europe, and often further; they know languages and literature; their daughters read Schiller, Manzoni, and Lamartine with ease. By means of reviews, newspapers, innumerable volumes of geography, statistics, and travels, they have the world at their finger-ends. They support and preside over scientific societies; if the free inquirers of Oxford, amidst conventional rigour, have been able to give their explanations of the Bible,



it is because they knew themselves to be backed by enlightened laymen of the highest rank. There is also no danger that this aristocracy should become a set; it renews itself; a great physician, a profound lawyer, an illustrious general, become ennobled and found families. When a manufacturer or merchant has gained a large fortune, he first thinks of acquiring an estate; after two or three generations his family has taken root and shares in the government of the country: in this way the best saplings of the great popular forest fill up the aristocratic nursery. Observe, finally, that an aristocracy in England is not an isolated fact. Everywhere there are leaders recognised, respected, followed with confidence and deference, who feel their responsibility, and carry the burden as well as the advantages of the dignity. Such an aristocracy exists in marriage, where the man incontestably rules, followed by his wife to the end of the world, faithfully waited for in the evenings, unshackled in his business, of which he does not speak. There is such in the family, when the father<sup>1</sup> can disinherit his children, and keeps up with them, in the most petty circumstances of daily life, a degree of authority and dignity unknown in France: if in England a son, through ill-health, has been away for some time from his home, he dare not come into the country to see his father without first asking if he may come; a servant to whom I gave my card refused to take it, saying, "Oh! I dare not hand it in now. Master is dining." There is respect in all ranks, in the workshops as well as in the fields, in the army as in the family. Throughout there are inferiors and

<sup>1</sup> In familiar language, the father is called in England the governor; in France *le banquier*.

superiors who feel themselves so; if the mechanism of established power were thrown out of gear, we should behold it reconstructed of itself; below the legal constitution is the social, and human action is forced into a solid mould prepared for it.

It is because this aristocratic network is strong that human action can be free; for local and natural government being rooted throughout, like ivy, by a hundred small, ever-growing fibres, sudden movements, violent as they are, are not capable of pulling it up altogether. In vain men speak, cry out, call meetings, hold processions, form leagues: they will not demolish the state; they have not to deal with a set of functionaries who have no real hold on the country, and who, like all external applications, can be replaced by another set: the thirty or forty gentlemen of a district, rich, influential, trusted, useful as they are, will become the leaders of the district. "As we see in the papers," says Montesquieu, speaking of England, "that they are playing the devil, we fancy that the people will revolt to-morrow." Not at all, it is their way of speaking; they only talk loudly and rudely. Two days after I arrived in London, I saw advertising men walking with a placard on their backs and their stomachs, bearing these words: "Great usurpation! Outrage of the Lords, in their vote on the budget, against the rights of the people." But then the placard added, "Fellow-countrymen, petition!" Things end thus; they argue freely, and if the reasoning is good it will spread. Another time in Hyde Park, orators were declaiming in the open air against the Lords, who were called rogues. The audience applauded or hissed, as it pleased them. "After all," said an Englishman to me, "this

is how we manage our business. With us, when a man has an idea, he writes it; a dozen men think it good, and all contribute money to publish it; this creates a little association, which grows, prints cheap pamphlets, gives lectures, then petitions, calls forth public opinion, and at last takes the matter into Parliament; Parliament refuses or delays it; yet the matter gains weight: the majority of the nation pushes, forces open the doors, and then you'll have a law passed." It is open to every one to do this; workmen can league against their masters; in fact, their associations embrace all England; at Preston I believe there was once a strike which lasted more than six months. They will sometimes mob, but never revolt; they know political economy by this time, and understand that to do violence to capital is to suppress work. Their chief quality is coolness; here, as elsewhere, temperament has great influence. Anger, blood does not rise at once to their eyes, as in the southern nations; a long interval always separates idea from action, and wise arguments, repeated calculations, occupy the interval. If we go to a meeting, we see men of every condition, ladies who come for the thirtieth time to hear the same speech, full of figures, on education, cotton, wages. They do not seem to be wearied; they can bring argument against argument, be patient, protest gravely, recommence their protest; they are the same people who wait for the train on the platform, without getting crushed, and who play cricket for a couple of hours without raising their voices or quarrelling for an instant. Two coachmen, who run into one another, set themselves free without storming or scolding. Thus their political association endures; they can be free because they

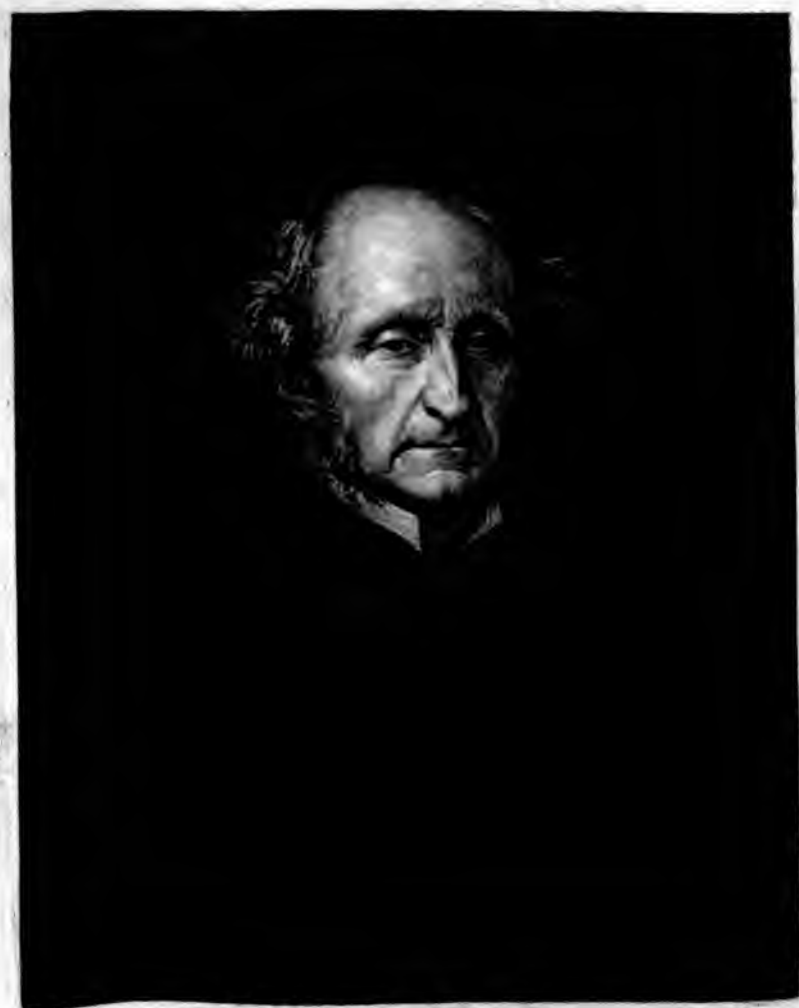
have natural leaders and patient nerves. After all, the state is a machine like other machines; let us try to have good wheels, and take care not to break them; Englishmen have the double advantage of possessing very good ones, and of managing them coolly.

## IV.

Such is our Englishman, with his laws and his administration. Now that he has private comfort and public security, what will he do, and how will he govern himself in this higher, nobler domain, to which man climbs in order to contemplate beauty and truth? At all events, the arts do not lead him there. That vast London is monumental; but, like the castle of a man who has become rich, everything there is well preserved and costly, but nothing more. Those lofty houses of massive stone, burdened with porches, short columns, Greek decorations, are generally gloomy; the poor columns of the monuments seem washed with ink. On Sunday, in foggy weather, we would think ourselves in a cemetery; the perfect readable names on the houses, in brass letters, are like sepulchral inscriptions. There is nothing beautiful: at most, the varnished middle-class houses, with their patch of green, are pleasant; we feel that they are well kept, commodious, capital for a business man who wants to amuse himself and unbend after a hard day's work. But a finer and higher sentiment could relish nothing here. As to the statues, it is difficult not to laugh at them. We see the Duke of Wellington, with a cocked hat and iron plumes; Nelson, with a cable which serves him for a tail, planted on his column, and pierced by a lightning-

conductor, like a rat impaled on the end of a pole; or again, the half-dressed Waterloo Generals, crowned by Victory. The English, though flesh and bone, seem manufactured out of sheet-iron: how much stiffer will English statues look? They pride themselves on their painting; at least they study it with surprising minuteness, in the Chinese fashion; they can paint a truss of hay so exactly, that a botanist will tell the species of every stalk; one artist lived three months under canvas on a heath, so that he might thoroughly know heath. Many are excellent observers, especially of moral expression, and succeed very well in showing the soul in the face; we are instructed by looking at them; we go through a course of psychology with them; they can illustrate a novel; we are touched by the poetic and dreamy meaning of many of their landscapes. But in genuine painting, picturesque painting, they are revolting. I do not think there were ever laid upon canvas such crude colours, such stiff forms, stuffs so much like tin, such glaring contrasts. Fancy an opera, with nothing but false notes in it. We may see landscapes painted blood-red, trees which split the canvas, turf which looks like a pot of overturned green, Christs looking as if they were baked and preserved in oil, expressive stags, sentimental dogs, undressed women, to whom we should like forthwith to offer a garment. In music, they import the Italian opera; it is an orange-tree kept up at great cost in the midst of turnips. The arts require idle, delicate minds,—not stoics, especially not puritans,—easily shocked by dissonance, inclined to visible pleasure, employing their long periods of leisure, their free reveries, in harmoniously arranging, and with no other object but enjoyment, forms, colours

12



*JOHN STUART MILL*





and sounds. I need not say that here the bent of mind is quite the opposite; and we see clearly enough why, amidst these combative politicians, these laborious toilers, these men of energetic action, art can but produce exotic or ill-shaped fruit.

Not so in science; but in science there are two divisions. It may be treated as a business, to glean and verify observations, to combine experiments, to arrange figures, to weigh probabilities, to discover facts, partial laws, to possess laboratories, libraries, societies charged with storing and increasing positive knowledge; in all this Englishmen excel. They have even a Lyell, a Darwin, an Owen, able to embrace and renew a science; in the construction of the vast edifice, the industrious masons, masters of the second rank, are not lacking; it is the great architects, the thinkers, the genuine speculative minds, who fail them; philosophy, especially metaphysics, is as little indigenous here as music and painting; they import it, and yet they leave the best part on the road. Carlyle was obliged to transform it into a mystical poetry, humorous and prophetic fancies; Hamilton touched upon it only to declare it chimerical; Stuart Mill and Buckle, only seized the most palpable part,—a heavy residuum, positivism. It is not in metaphysics that the English mind can find its vent. It is on other objects that the spirit of liberal inquiry—the sublime instincts of the mind, the craving for the universal and the infinite, the desire of ideal and perfect things—will fall back. Let us take the day on which the hush of business leaves a free field for disinterested aspirations. There is no more striking spectacle for a foreigner than Sunday in London. The streets are empty, and the churches full. An Act of

Parliament forbids any playing to-day, public or private; the public-houses are not allowed to harbour people during divine service. Moreover, all respectable people are at worship, the seats are full: it is not as in France, where there are none but servants, old women, a few sleepy people, of private means, and a sprinkling of elegant ladies; but in England we see men well dressed, or at least decently clad, and as many gentlemen as ladies in church. Religion does not remain out of the pale, and below the standard of public culture; the young, the learned, the best of the nation, all the upper and middle classes, continue attached to it. The clergyman, even in a village, is not a peasant's son, with not over much polish, just out of the seminary, shackled in a cloistral education, separated from society by celibacy, half-buried in mediævalism. In England he is a man of the times, often a man of the world, often of good family, with the interests, habits, freedom of other men; keeping sometimes a carriage, several servants, having elegant manners, generally well informed, who has read and still reads. On all these grounds he is able to be in his neighbourhood the leader of ideas, as his neighbour the squire is the leader of business. If he does not walk in the same path as the free-thinkers, he is not more than a step or two behind them; a modern man, a Parisian, can talk with him on all lofty themes, and not perceive a gulf between his own mind and the clergyman's. Strictly speaking, he is a layman like ourselves; the only difference is, that he is a superintendent of morality. Even in his externals, except for occasional bands and the perpetual white tie, he is like us; at first sight, we would take him for a professor, a magistrate, or a notary; and his sermons

agree with his person. He does not anathematise the world ; in this his doctrine is modern ; he follows the broad path in which the Renaissance and the Reformation impelled religion. When Christianity arose, eighteen centuries ago, it was in the East, in the land of the Essenes and Therapeutists, amid universal dejection and despair, when the only deliverance seemed a renunciation of the world, an abandonment of civil life, destruction of the natural instincts, and a daily waiting for the kingdom of God. When it rose again, three centuries ago, it was in the West, amongst laborious and half-free peoples, amidst universal restoration and invention, when man, improving his condition, regained confidence in his worldly destiny, and widely expanded his faculties. No wonder if the new Protestantism differs from the ancient Christianity, if it enjoins action instead of preaching asceticism, if it authorises comforts in place of prescribing mortification, if it honours marriage, work, patriotism, inquiry, science, all natural affections and faculties, in place of praising celibacy, withdrawal from the world, scorn of the age, ecstasy, captivity of mind, and mutilation of the heart. By this infusion of the modern spirit, Christianity has received new blood, and Protestantism now constitutes, with science, the two motive organs, and, as it were, the double heart of European life. For, in accepting the rehabilitation of the world, it has not renounced the purification of man's heart ; on the contrary, it is towards this that it has directed its whole effort. It has cut off from religion all the portions which are not this very purification, and, by reducing it, has strengthened it. An institution, like a machine, and like a man, is the more powerful for being more special : a work is done better because it is done singly,

and because we concentrate ourselves upon it. By the suppression of legends and religious observances, human thought in its entirety has been concentrated on a single object—moral amelioration. It is of this men speak in the churches, gravely and coldly, with a succession of sensible and solid arguments; how a man ought to reflect on his duties, mark them one by one in his mind, make for himself principles, have a sort of inner code, freely accepted and firmly established, to which he may refer all his actions without bias or hesitation; how these principles may be rooted by practice; how unceasing examination, personal effort, the continual edification of himself by himself, ought slowly to confirm our resolution in uprightness. These are the questions which, with a multitude of examples, proofs, appeals to daily experience,<sup>1</sup> are brought forward in all the pulpits, to develop in man a voluntary reformation, a guard and empire over himself, the habit of self-restraint, and a kind of modern stoicism, almost as noble as the ancient. On all hands laymen help in this; and moral warning, given by literature as well as by theology, harmoniously unites society and the clergy. Hardly ever does a book paint a man in a disinterested manner: critics, philosophers, historians, novelists, poets even, give a lesson, maintain a theory, unmask or punish a vice, represent a temptation overcome, relate the history of a character being formed. Their exact and minute description of sentiments ends always in approbation or blame; they are not artists, but moralists: it is only in a Protestant country that we will find a novel entirely occupied in describing the progress

<sup>1</sup> Let the reader, amongst many others, peruse the sermons of Dr. Arnold, delivered in the School Chapel at Rugby.

of moral sentiment in a child of twelve.<sup>1</sup> All co-operate in this direction in religion, and even in the mystic part of it. Byzantine distinctions and subtleties have been allowed to fall away; Germanic inquisitiveness and speculations have not been introduced; the God of conscience reigns alone; feminine sweetness has been cut off; we do not find the husband of souls, the lovable consoler, whom the author of the *Imitation of Christ* follows even in his tender dreams; something manly breathes from religion in England; we find that the Old Testament, the severe Hebrew Psalms, have left their imprint here. It is no longer an intimate friend to whom a man confides his petty desires, his small troubles, a sort of affectionate and quite human priestly guide; it is no longer a king whose relations and courtiers he tries to gain over, and from whom he looks for favour or place; we see in him only a guardian of duty, and we speak to him of nothing else. What we ask of him is the strength to be virtuous, the inner renewal by which we become capable of always doing good; and such a prayer is in itself a sufficient lever to tear a man from his weaknesses. What we know of the Deity is that he is perfectly righteous; and such a reliance suffices to represent all the events of life as an approach to the reign of righteousness. Strictly speaking, righteousness alone exists; the world is a figure which conceals it, but heart and conscience sustain it, and there is nothing important or true in man but the embrace by which he holds it. So speak the old grave prayers, the severe hymns which are sung

<sup>1</sup> *The Wide Wide World*, by Elizabeth Wetherell (an American book). See also the novels of Miss Yonge, and chiefly those of George Eliot.

in the church, accompanied by the organ. Though a Frenchman, and brought up in a different religion, I listened to them with a sincere admiration and emotion. Serious and grand poems, which, opening a path to the Infinite, let in a ray of light into the limitless darkness, and satisfy the deep poetic instincts, the vague desire of sublimity and melancholy, which this race has manifested from its origin, and which it has preserved to the end.

### V.

As the basis of the present as well as of the past ever reappears an inner and persistent cause, the *character* of the race; transmission and climate have maintained it; a violent perturbation—the Norman Conquest—warped it; finally, after various oscillations, it was manifested by the conception of a special ideal, which gradually fashioned or produced religion, literature, institutions. Thus fixed and expressed, it was henceforth the mover of the rest; it explains the present, on it depends the future; its force and direction will produce the present and future civilisation. Now that great historic violences—I mean the destructions and enslavements of peoples—have become almost impracticable, each nation can develop its life according to its own conception of life; the chances of a war, a discovery, have no hold but on details; national inclinations and aptitudes alone now show the great features of a national history; when twenty-five millions of men conceive the good and useful after a certain type, they will seek and end by attaining this kind of the good and useful. The Englishman has henceforth his priest, his gentleman, his manufacture, his comfort, and his novel. If we wish to know

in what sense this work will alter, we must enquire in what sense the central conception will change. A vast revolution has taken place during the last three centuries in human intelligence,—like those regular and vast uprisings which, displacing a continent, displace all the prospects. We know that positive discoveries go on increasing day by day, that they will increase daily more and more, that from object to object they reach the most lofty, that they begin by renewing the science of man, that their useful application and their philosophical consequences are ceaselessly unfolded; in short, that their universal encroachment will at last comprise the whole human mind. From this body of invading truths springs in addition an original conception of the good and the useful, and, moreover, a new idea of church and state, art and industry, philosophy and religion. This has its power, as the old idea had; it is scientific, if the other was national; it is supported on proved facts, if the other was upon established things. Already their opposition is being manifested; already their labours begin; and we may affirm beforehand, that the proximate condition of English civilisation will depend upon their divergence or their agreement.





## BOOK V.

### MODERN AUTHORS.

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#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE translator thinks it due to M. Taine to state, that the fifth book, on the *Modern Authors*, was written whilst Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay, and Mill were still alive. He also gives the original preface of that book :—

“This fifth book is the complement to the *History of English Literature* ; it is written on another plan, because the subject is different. The present period is not yet completed, and the ideas which govern it are in process of formation, that is, in the rough. We cannot therefore as yet systematically arrange them. When documents are still mere indications, history is necessarily reduced to “studies ;” knowledge is moulded from life ; and our conclusions cannot be other than incomplete, so long as the facts which suggest them are unfinished. Fifty years hence the history of this age may be written ; in the meantime we can but sketch it. I have selected from contemporary English writers the most original minds, the most consistent, and the most contrasted ; they may be regarded as specimens, representing the common features, the opposing tendencies, and consequently the general direction of the public mind.

“They are only specimens. By the side of Macaulay and Carlyle we have historians like Hallam, Buckle, and Grote ; by the side of Dickens, novel-writers like Bulwer, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, and many more ; by the side of

Tennyson, poets like Elizabeth Browning ; by the side of Stuart Mill, philosophers like Hamilton, Bain, and Herbert Spencer. I pass over the vast number of men of talent who write anonymously in reviews, and who, like soldiers in an army, display at times more clearly than their generals the faculties and inclinations of their time and their country. If we look for the common marks in this multitude of varied minds, we shall, I think, find the two salient features which I have already pointed out. One of these features is proper to English civilisation, the other to the civilisation of the nineteenth century. The one is national, the other European. On the one hand, special to this people, their literature is an inquiry instituted into humanity, altogether positive, and consequently only partially beautiful or philosophical, but very exact, minute, useful, and moreover very moral ; and this to such a degree, that sometimes the generosity or purity of its aspirations raises it to a height which no artist or philosopher has transcended. On the other hand, in common with the various peoples of our age, this literature subordinates dominant creeds and institutions to private inquiry and established science—I mean, to that irresponsible tribunal which is erected in each man's individual conscience, and to that universal authority which the diverse human judgments, mutually rectified, and controlled by practice, borrow from the verifications of experience, and from their own harmony.

“ Whatever be the judgment passed on these tendencies and on these doctrines, we cannot, I think, refuse them the merit of spontaneity and originality. They are living and thriving plants. The six writers, described in this volume, have expressed efficacious and complete ideas on God, nature, man, science, religion, art, and morality. To produce such ideas we have in Europe at this day but three nations—England, Germany, and France. Those of England will here be found arranged, discussed, and compared with those of the other two thinking countries.”

## CHAPTER I

### *The Novel—Dickens.*

WERE Dickens dead, his biography might be written. On the day after the burial of a celebrated man, his friends and enemies apply themselves to the work; his schoolfellows relate in the newspapers his boyish pranks; another man recalls exactly, and word for word, the conversations he had with him more than a score of years ago. The lawyer, who manages the affairs of the deceased, draws up a list of the different offices he has filled, his titles, dates and figures, and reveals to the matter-of-fact readers how the money left has been invested, and how the fortune has been made; the grandnephews and second cousins publish an account of his acts of humanity, and the catalogue of his domestic virtues. If there is no literary genius in the family, they select an Oxford man, conscientious, learned, who treats the deceased like a Greek author, collects endless documents, overloads them with endless comments, crowns the whole with endless discussions, and comes ten years later, some fine Christmas morning, with his white tie and placid smile, to present to the assembled family three quartos of eight hundred pages each, the easy style of which would send a German from Berlin to sleep. He is embraced by them with tears in their eyes; they make him sit down; he is the chief ornament at their feasts; and his work is sent to the

*Edinburgh Review.* The latter groans at the sight of the enormous present, and tells off a young and intrepid member of the staff to concoct some kind of a biography from the table of contents. Another advantage of posthumous biographies is, that the dead man is no longer there to refute either biographer or man of learning.

Unfortunately Dickens is still alive, and refutes the biographies made of him. What is worse, he claims to be his own biographer. His translator in French once asked him for a few particulars of his life; Dickens replied that he kept them for himself. Without doubt, *David Copperfield*, his best novel, has much the appearance of a confession;<sup>1</sup> but where does the confession end, and how far does fiction embroider truth? All that is known, or rather all that is told, is that Dickens was born in 1812, that he is the son of a shorthand-writer, that he was himself at first a shorthand-writer, that he was poor and unfortunate in his youth, that his novels, published in parts, have gained for him a great fortune and an immense reputation. The reader may conjecture the rest; Dickens will tell it him one day, when he writes his memoirs. Meanwhile he closes the door, and leaves outside the too inquisitive folk who go on knocking. He has a right to do so.

<sup>1</sup> M. Taine was not wrong in thinking so. In the *Life of Charles Dickens* by J. Forster we find (vol. i. p. 8) the following words:—"And here I may at once expressly mention, what already has been hinted, that even as Fielding described himself and his belongings in Captain Booth and Amelia, and protested always that he had writ in his books nothing more than he had seen in life, so it may be said of Dickens, in more especial relation to *David Copperfield*. Many guesses have been made since his death, connecting David's autobiography with his own . . . There is not only truth in all this, but it will very shortly be seen that the identity went deeper than any had supposed, and covered experiences not less startling in the reality than they appear to be in the fiction."—*Tr.*

Though a man may be illustrious, he is not on that account public property; he is not compelled to be confidential; he still belongs to himself; he may reserve of himself what he thinks proper. If we give our works to our readers, we do not give our lives. Let us be satisfied with what Dickens has given us. Forty volumes suffice, and more than suffice, to enable us to know a man well; moreover, they show of him all that it is important to know. It is not through the accidental circumstances of his life that he belongs to history, but by his talent; and his talent is in his books. A man's genius is like a clock; it has its mechanism, and amongst its parts a mainspring. Find out this spring, show how it communicates movement to the others, pursue this movement from part to part down to the hands in which it ends. This inner history of genius does not depend upon the outer history of the man; and it is worth more.

### § 1.—THE AUTHOR.

#### I.

The first question which should be asked in connection with an artist is this: How does he regard objects? With what clearness, what energy, what force? The reply defines his whole work beforehand; for in a writer of novels the imagination is the master faculty; the art of composition, good taste, the feeling of what is true, depend upon it; one degree more of vehemence destroys the style which expresses it, changes the characters which it produces, breaks the plot in which it is enclosed. Consider the imaginative power

of Dickens, and you will perceive therein the cause of his faults and his merits, his power and his excess.

## II.

There is a painter in him, and an English painter. Never surely did a mind figure to itself with more exact detail or greater force all the parts and tints of a picture. Read this description of a storm; the images seem photographed by dazzling flashes of lightning:

"The eye, partaking of the quickness of the flashing light, saw it in its every gleam a multitude of objects which it could not see at steady noon in fifty times that period. Bells in steeples, with the rope and wheel that moved them; ragged nests of birds in cornices and nooks; faces full of consternation in the tilted waggons that came tearing past: their frightened teams ringing out a warning which the thunder drowned; harrows and ploughs left out in fields; miles upon miles of hedge-divided country, with the distant fringe of trees as obvious as the scarecrow in the beanfield close at hand; in a trembling, vivid, flickering instant, everything was clear and plain: then came a flush of red into the yellow light; a change to blue; a brightness so intense that there was nothing else but light; and then the deepest and profoundest darkness."<sup>1</sup>

An imagination so lucid and energetic cannot but animate inanimate objects without an effort. It provokes in the mind in which it works extraordinary emotions, and the author pours over the objects which he figures to himself, something of the ever-welling passion which overflows in him. Stones for him take a voice, white walls swell out into big phantoms, black

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xlii. The translator has used the "Charles Dickens" edition, 1868. 18 vols.

wells yawn hideously and mysteriously in the darkness ; legions of strange creatures whirl shuddering over the fantastic landscape ; blank nature is peopled, inert matter moves. But the images remain clear ; in this madness there is nothing vague or disorderly ; imaginary objects are designed with outlines as precise and details as numerous as real objects, and the dream is equal to the reality.

There is, amongst others, a description of the night wind, quaint and powerful, which recalls certain pages of *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The source of this description, as of all those of Dickens, is pure imagination. He does not, like Walter Scott, describe in order to give his reader a map, and to lay down the locality of his drama. He does not, like Lord Byron, describe from love of magnificent nature, and in order to display a splendid succession of grand pictures. He dreams neither of attaining exactness nor of selecting beauty. Struck with a certain spectacle, he is transported, and breaks out into unforeseen figures. Now it is the yellow leaves, pursued by the wind, fleeing and jostling, shivering, scared, in a giddy chase, clinging to the furrows, drowned in the ditches, perching on the trees.<sup>1</sup> Here it is the night wind, sweeping round a church,

<sup>1</sup> "It was small tyranny for a respectable wind to go wreaking its vengeance on such poor creatures as the fallen leaves ; but this wind happening to come up with a great heap of them just after venting its humour on the insulted Dragon, did so disperse and scatter them that they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress. Nor was this enough for its malicious fury : for, not content with driving them abroad, it charged small parties of them and hunted them into the wheelwright's saw-pit, and below the planks and timbers in the yard, and, scattering the saw-dust



moaning as it tries with its unseen hand the windows and the doors, and seeking out some crevices by which to enter :

“ And when it has got in ; as one not finding what he seeks, whatever that may be ; it wails and howls to issue forth again : and, not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters : then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls : seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter ; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting.”<sup>1</sup>

Hitherto you have only recognised the sombre imagination of a man of the north. A little further you perceive the impassioned religion of a revolutionary Protestant, when he speaks to you of “ a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar ; where it seems to chaunt, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped ; in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh ! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire ! It has an awful voice, that wind at

in the air, it looked for them underneath, and when it did meet with any, whew ! how it drove them on and followed at their heels !

“ The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was : for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure ; and they crept under the eaves of houses, and clung tightly to the sides of hay-ricks, like bats ; and tore in at open chamber windows, and cowered close to hedges ; and, in short, went anywhere for safety.”—(*Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. ii.)

<sup>1</sup> *The Chimes*, first quarter.

Midnight, singing in a church!" But an instant after, the artist speaks again; he leads you to the belfry, and in the jingle of the accumulated words, communicates to your nerves the sensation of an aerial tempest. The wind whistles, blows, and gambols in the arches: "High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver!"<sup>1</sup> Dickens has seen it all in the old belfry; his thought is a mirror; not the smallest or ugliest detail escapes him. He has counted "the iron rails ragged with rust;" "the sheets of lead," wrinkled and shrivelled, which crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; "the shabby nests" which "the birds stuff into corners" of the old oaken joists and beams; the gray dust heaped up; "the speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security," which, hanging by a thread, "swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells," and which "climb up sailor-like in quick-alarm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of nimble legs to save one life." This picture captivates us. Kept up at such a height, amongst the fleeting clouds which cast their shadows over the town, and the feeble lights scarce distinguished in the mist, we feel a sort of dizziness; and we nearly discover, with Dickens, thought and a soul in the metallic voice of the chimes which inhabit this trembling castle.

He writes a story about them, and it is not the first. Dickens is a poet; he is as much at home in the imaginative world as in the actual. Here the chimes are talking to the old messenger and consoling him.

<sup>1</sup> *The Chimes*, first quarter.

Elsewhere it is the Cricket on the Hearth singing of all domestic joys, and bringing before the eyes of the lonely master the happy evenings, the intimate conversations, the comfort, the quiet cheerfulness which he has enjoyed, and which he has no longer. In another tale it is the history of a sick and precocious child who feels itself dying, and who, sleeping in the arms of its sister, hears the distant song of the murmuring waves which rocked him to sleep. Objects, with Dickens, take their hue from the thoughts of his characters. His imagination is so lively, that it carries everything with it in the path which it chooses. If the character is happy, the stones, flowers, and clouds must be happy too; if he is sad, nature must weep with him. Even to the ugly houses in the street, all speak. The style runs through a swarm of visions; it breaks out into the strangest oddities. Here is a young girl, pretty and good, who crosses Fountain Court and the law purlieus in search of her brother. What can be more simple? what even more trivial? Dickens is carried away by it. To entertain her, he summons up birds, trees, houses, the fountain, the offices, law papers, and much besides. It is a folly, and it is all but an enchantment:

“Whether there was life enough left in the slow vegetation of Fountain Court for the smoky shrubs to have any consciousness of the brightest and purest-hearted little woman in the world, is a question for gardeners, and those who are learned in the loves of plants. But that it was a good thing for that same paved yard to have such a delicate little figure fitting through it; that it passed like a smile from the grimy old houses, and the worn flagstones, and left them duller, darker, sterner than before; there is no sort of doubt. The Temple fountain might have leaped up twenty feet to greet the spring of hopeful maiden-

hood, that in her person stole on, sparkling, through the dry and dusty channels of the Law; the chirping sparrows, bred in Temple chinks and crannies, might have held their peace to listen to imaginary sky-larks, as so fresh a little creature passed, the dingy boughs, unused to droop, otherwise than in their puny growth might have bent down in a kindred gracefulness, to shed their benedictions on her graceful head; old love-letters, shut up in iron boxes in the neighbouring offices, and made of no account among the heaps of family papers into which they had strayed, and of which, in their degeneracy, they formed a part, might have stirred and fluttered with a moment's recollection of their ancient tenderness, as she went lightly by. Anything might have happened that did not happen, and never will, for the love of Ruth."<sup>1</sup>

This is far-fetched, without doubt. French taste, always measured, revolts against these affected strokes, these sickly prettinesses. And yet this affectation is natural; Dickens does not hunt after quaintnesses; they come to him. His excessive imagination is like a string too tightly stretched; it produces of itself, without any violent shock, sounds not heard elsewhere.

We shall see how it is excited. Imagine a shop, no matter what shop, the most repulsive; that of a mathematical-instrument maker. Dickens sees the barometers, chronometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, speaking trumpets, and so forth. He sees so many, sees them so clearly, they are crowded and crammed, they replace each other so forcibly in his brain, which they fill and obstruct; there are so many geographical and nautical ideas exposed under the glass cases hung from the ceiling, nailed to the wall, they swamp him from so many sides, and in such abundance,

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xlv.

that he loses his judgment. "The shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world."<sup>1</sup>

The difference between a madman and a man of genius is not very great. Napoleon, who knew men, said so to Esquirol.<sup>2</sup> The same faculty leads us to glory or throws us into a cell in a lunatic asylum. It is visionary imagination which forges the phantoms of the madman and creates the personages of an artist, and the classifications serving for the first may serve for the second. The imagination of Dickens is like that of monomaniacs. To plunge oneself into an idea, to be absorbed by it, to see nothing else, to repeat it under a hundred forms, to enlarge it, to carry it, thus enlarged, to the eye of the spectator, to dazzle and overwhelm him with it, to stamp it upon him so firmly and deeply that he can never again tear it from his memory,—these are the great features of this imagination and style. In this, *David Copperfield* is a masterpiece. Never did objects remain more visible and present to the memory of a reader than those which he describes. The old house, the parlour, the kitchen, Peggotty's boat, and above all the school play-ground, are interiors whose relief, energy, and precision are unequalled. Dickens has the passion and patience of the painters of his nation; he reckons his details one by one, notes the various hues of the old tree-trunks; sees the dilapidated cask, the greenish and broken flagstones, the chinks of the damp walls; he distinguishes the strange smells which rise from them; marks the size of the mildewed spots, reads

<sup>1</sup> *Dombey and Son*, ch. iv.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, vol. ii. note, page 123.

the names of the scholars carved on the door, and dwells on the form of the letters. And this minute description has nothing cold about it: if it is thus detailed, it is because the contemplation was intense; it proves its passion by its exactness. We felt this passion without accounting for it; suddenly we find it at the end of a page; the boldness of the style renders it visible, and the violence of the phrase attests the violence of the impression. Excessive metaphors bring before the mind grotesque fancies. We feel ourselves beset by extravagant visions. Mr. Mell takes his flute, and blows on it, says Copperfield, "until I almost thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys."<sup>1</sup> Tom Pinch, disabused at last, discovers that his master Pecksniff is a hypocritical rogue. He "had so long been used to steep the Pecksniff of his fancy in his tea, and spread him out upon his toast, and take him as a relish with his beer, that he made but a poor breakfast on the first morning after his expulsion."<sup>2</sup> We think of Hoffmann's fantastic tales; we are arrested by a fixed idea, and our head begins to ache. These eccentricities are in the style of sickness rather than of health.

Therefore Dickens is admirable in depicting hallucinations. We see that he feels himself those of his characters, that he is engrossed by their ideas, that he enters into their madness. As an Englishman and a moralist, he has described remorse frequently. Perhaps it may be said that he makes a scarecrow of it, and that an artist is wrong to transform himself into an assistant of the policeman and the preacher. What of that? The portrait of Jonas Chuzzlewit is so terrible,

<sup>1</sup> *David Copperfield*, ch. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xxxvi.

that we may pardon it for being useful. Jonas, leaving his chamber secretly, has treacherously murdered his enemy, and thinks henceforth to breathe in peace; but the recollection of the murder gradually disorganises his mind, like poison. He is no longer able to control his ideas; they bear him on with the fury of a terrified horse. He is for ever thinking, and shuddering as he thinks, of the room where people believed he slept. He sees this room, counts the tiles of the floor, pictures the long folds of the dark curtains, the tumbled bed, the door at which some one might have knocked. The more he wants to escape from this vision, the more he is immersed in it; it is a burning abyss in which he rolls, struggling, with cries and sweats of agony. He fancies himself lying in his bed, as he ought to be, and an instant after he sees himself there. He fears this other self. The dream is so vivid, that he is not sure that he is not in London. "He became in a manner his own ghost and phantom." And this imaginary being, like a mirror, only redoubles before his conscience the image of assassination and punishment. He returns, and shuffles, with pale face, to the door of his chamber. He, a man of business, a man of figures, a coarse machine of positive reasoning, has become as fanciful as a nervous woman. "He stole on, to the door, on tip-toe, as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest." At the moment when he turns the key in the lock, "a monstrous fear beset his mind. What if the murdered man were there before him." At last he enters, and tumbles into bed, burnt up with fever. "He buried himself beneath the blankets," so as to try not to see "that infernal room"; he sees it more clearly still. The rustling of the clothes, the buzz of an insect, the

beatings of his heart, all cry to him Murderer! His mind fixed with "an agony of listening" on the door, he ends by thinking that people open it; he hears it creak. His senses are distorted; he dares not mistrust them, he dares no longer believe in them; and in this nightmare, in which drowned reason leaves nothing but a chaos of hideous forms, he finds no reality but the incessant burden of his convulsive despair. Thenceforth all his thoughts, dangers, the whole world disappears for him in "the one dread question only," "When would they find the body in the wood?" He forces himself to distract his thoughts from this; they remain stamped and glued to it; they hold him to it as by a chain of iron. He continually figures himself going into the wood, "going softly about it and about it among the leaves, approaching it nearer and nearer through a gap in the boughs, and startling the very flies, that were thickly sprinkled all over it, like heaps of dried currants." His mind was fixed and fastened on the discovery, for intelligence of which he listened intently to every cry and shout; listened when any one came in, or went out; watched from the window the people who passed up and down the street." At the same time, he has ever before his eyes that corpse "lying alone in the wood;" "he was for ever showing and presenting it, as it were, to every creature whom he saw. 'Look here! do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect *me*?' If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him, or a cause of more monotonous and dismal occupation than it was in this state of his mind."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. II.



Jonas is on the verge of madness. There are other characters quite mad. Dickens has drawn three or four portraits of madmen, very funny at first sight, but so true that they are in reality horrible. It needed an imagination like his, irregular, excessive, capable of fixed ideas, to exhibit the derangements of reason. Two especially there are, which make us laugh, and which make us shudder. Augustus, a gloomy maniac, who is on the point of marrying Miss Pecksniff; and poor Mr. Dick, partly an idiot, partly a monomaniac, who lives with Miss Trotwood. To understand these sudden exaltations, these unforeseen gloominesses, these incredible summersaults of perverted sensitiveness; to reproduce these hiatuses of thought, these interruptions of reasoning, this recurrence of a word, always the same, which breaks in upon a phrase attempted and overturns nascent reason; to see the stupid smile, the vacant look, the foolish and uneasy physiognomy of these haggard old children who painfully grope about from one idea to another, and stumble at every step on the threshold of the truth which they cannot attain, is a faculty which Hoffmann alone has possessed in an equal degree with Dickens. The play of these shattered reasons is like the creaking of a door on its rusty hinges; it makes one sick to hear it. We find in it, if we like, a discordant burst of laughter, but we discover still more easily a groan and a lamentation, and we are terrified to gauge the lucidity, strangeness, exaltation, violence of imagination which has produced such creations, which has carried them on and sustained them unbendingly to the end, and which found itself in its proper sphere in imitating and producing their irrationality.

## III.

To what can this force be applied? Imaginations differ not only in their nature, but also in their object; after having gauged their energy, we must define their domain; in the wide world the artist makes a world for himself; involuntarily he chooses a class of objects which he prefers; others do not warm his genius, and he does not perceive them. Dickens does not perceive great things; this is the second feature of his imagination. Enthusiasm seizes him in connection with everything, especially in connection with vulgar objects, a curiosity shop, a sign-post, a town-crier. He has vigour, he does not attain beauty. His instrument produces vibrating, but not harmonious sounds. If he is describing a house, he will draw it with geometrical clearness; he will put all its colours in relief, discover a face and thought in the shutters and the spouts; he will make a sort of human being out of the house, grimacing and forcible, which attracts our attention, and which we shall never forget; but he will not see the grandeur of the long monumental lines, the calm majesty of the broad shadows boldly divided by the white plaster; the cheerfulness of the light which covers them, and becomes palpable in the black niches in which it dives as though to rest and to sleep. If he is painting a landscape, he will perceive the haws which dot with their red fruit the leafless hedges, the thin vapour steaming from a distant stream, the motions of an insect in the grass; but the deep poetry which the author of *Valentine* and *André*<sup>1</sup> would have felt, will escape him. He will be lost, like the painters of his country, in the minute and

<sup>1</sup> Novels of George Sand.

impassioned observation of small things ; he will have no love of beautiful forms and fine colours. He will not perceive that the blue and the red, the straight line and the curve, are enough to compose vast concerts, which amidst so many various expressions maintain a grand serenity, and open up in the depths of the soul a spring of health and happiness. Happiness is lacking in him ; his inspiration is a feverish rapture, which does not select its objects, which animates promiscuously the ugly, the vulgar, the ridiculous, and which communicating to his creations an indescribable jerkiness and violence, deprives them of the delight and harmony which in other hands they might have retained. Miss Ruth is a very pretty housekeeper ; she puts on her apron ; what a treasure this apron is ! Dickens turns it over and over, like a milliner's shopman who wants to sell it. She holds it in her hands, then she puts it round her waist, ties the strings, spreads it out, smoothes it that it may fall well. What does she not do with her apron ? And how delighted is Dickens during these innocent occupations ? He utters little exclamations of joyous fun. " Oh heaven, what a wicked little stomacher ! " He apostrophises a ring, he sports round Ruth, he is so delighted that he claps his hands. It is much worse when she is making the pudding ; there is a whole scene, dramatic and lyric, with exclamations, protasis, sudden inversions as complete as a Greek tragedy. These kitchen refinements and this waggery of imagination make us think, by way of contrast, of the household pictures of George Sand, of the room of Geneviève the flower-girl. She, like Ruth, is making a useful object, very useful, since she will sell it to-morrow for tenpence ; but this object is a full-blown rose, whose fragile petals are moulded

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by her fingers as by the fingers of a fairy, whose fresh corolla is purpled with a vermillion as tender as that of her cheeks ; a fragile masterpiece which bloomed on an evening of poetic emotion, whilst from her window she beheld in the sky the piercing and divine eyes of the stars, and in the depths of her virgin heart murmured the first breath of love. Dickens does not need such a sight for his transports ; a stage-coach throws him into dithyrambs ; the wheels, the splashing, the cracking whip, the clatter of the horses, harness, the vehicle ; here is enough to transport him. He feels sympathetically the motion of the coach ; it bears him along with it ; he hears the gallop of the horses in his brain, and goes off, uttering this ode, which seems to proceed from the guard's horn :

“Yoho, among the gathering shades ; making of no account the deep reflections of the trees, but scampering on through light and darkness, all the same, as if the light of London, fifty miles away, were quite enough to travel by, and some to spare. Yoho, beside the village green, where cricket-players linger yet, and every little indentation made in the fresh grass by bat or wicket, ball or player's foot, sheds out its perfume on the night. Away with four fresh horses from the Bald-faced Stag, where toppers congregate about the door admiring ; and the last team, with traces hanging loose, go roaming off towards the pond, until observed and shouted after by a dozen throats, while volunteering boys pursue them. Now, with a clattering of hoofs and striking out of fiery sparks, across the old stone bridge, and down again into the shadowy road, and through the open gate, and far away, away into the wold. Yoho !

“Yoho, behind there, stop that bugle for a moment ! Come creeping over to the front, along the coach-roof, guard, and make one at this basket ! Not that we slacken in our pace the while, not we : we rather put the bits of blood upon their mettle, for the greater glory of the snack. Ah ! It is long since this bottle

of old wine was brought into contact with the mellow breath of night, you may depend, and rare good stuff it is to wet a bugler's whistle with. Only try it. Don't be afraid of turning up your finger, Bill, another pull! Now, take your breath, and try the bugle, Bill. There's music! There's a tone! "Over the hills and far away," indeed, Yoho! The skittish mare is all alive to-night. Yoho! Yoho!

"See the bright moon; high up before we know it; making the earth reflect the objects on its breast like water. Hedges, trees, low cottages, church steeples, blighted stumps and flourishing young slips, have all grown vain upon the sudden, and mean to contemplate their own fair images till morning. The poplars yonder rustle, that their quivering leaves may see themselves upon the ground. Not so the oak; trembling does not become *him*; and he watches himself in his stout old burly steadfastness, without the motion of a twig. The moss-grown gate, ill poised upon its creaking hinges, crippled and decayed, swings to and fro before its glass like some fantastic dowager; while our own ghostly likeness travels on, Yoho! Yoho! through ditch and brake, upon the ploughed land and the smooth, along the steep hill-side and steeper wall, as if it were a phantom-Hunter.

"Clouds too! And a mist upon the Hollow! Not a dull fog that hides it, but a light, airy, gauze-like mist, which in our eyes of modest admiration gives a new charm to the beauties it is spread before: as real gauze has done ere now, and would again, so please you, though we were the Pope. Yoho! Why, now we travel like the Moon herself. Hiding this minute in a grove of trees, next minute in a patch of vapour, emerging now upon our broad, clear course, withdrawing now, but always dashing on, our journey is a counterpart of hers. Yoho! A match against the Moon!

"The beauty of the night is hardly felt, when Day comes leaping up. Yoho! Two stages, and the country roads are almost changed to a continuous street. Yoho, past market gardens, rows of houses, villas, crescents, terraces, and squares;

past waggons, coaches, carts; past early workmen, late stragglers, drunken men, and sober carriers of loads; past brick and mortar in its every shape; and in among the rattling pavements, where a jaunty-seat upon a coach is not so easy to preserve! Yoho down countless turnings, and through countless mazy ways, until an old Inn-yard is gained, and Tom Pinch, getting down, quite stunned and giddy, is in London!"<sup>1</sup>

All this to tell us that Tom Pinch is come to London! This fit of lyric poetry, in which the most poetic extravagances spring from the most vulgar commonplaces, like sickly flowers growing in a broken old flower-pot, displays in its natural and quaint contrasts all the sides of Dickens' imagination. We shall have his portrait if we picture to ourselves a man who, with a stewpan in one hand and a postillion's whip in the other, took to making prophecies.

#### IV.

The reader already foresees what vehement emotions this species of imagination will produce. The mode of conception in a man governs the mode of thought. When the mind, barely attentive, follows the indistinct outlines of a rough sketched image, joy and grief glide past him with insensible touch. When the mind, with rapt attention, penetrates the minute details of a precise image, joy and grief shake the whole man.

Dickens has this attention, and sees these details: this is why he meets everywhere with objects of exaltation. He never abandons his impassioned tone; he never rests in a natural style and in simple narrative; he only rails or weeps; he writes but

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xxxvi.

satires or elegies. He has the feverish sensibility of a woman who laughs loudly, or melts into tears at the sudden shock of the slightest occurrence. This impassioned style is extremely potent, and to it may be attributed half the glory of Dickens. The majority of men have only weak emotions. We labour mechanically, and yawn much; three-fourths of things leave us cold; we go to sleep by habit, and we no longer remark the household scenes, petty details, stale adventures, which are the basis of our existence. A man comes, who suddenly renders them interesting; nay, who makes them dramatic, changes them into objects of admiration, tenderness and dread. Without leaving the fireside or the omnibus, we are trembling, our eyes full of tears, or shaken by fits of inextinguishable laughter. We are transformed, our life is doubled; our soul had been vegetating; now it feels, suffers, loves. The contrast, the rapid succession, the number of the sentiments, add further to its trouble; we are immersed for two hundred pages in a torrent of new emotions, contrary and increasing, which communicates its violence to the mind, which carries it away in digressions and falls, and only casts it on the bank enchanted and exhausted. It is an intoxication, and on a delicate soul the effect would be too forcible; but it suits the English public, and that public has justified it.

This sensibility can hardly have more than two issues—laughter and tears. There are others, but they are only reached by lofty eloquence; they are the path to sublimity, and we have seen that for Dickens this path is cut off. Yet there is no writer who knows better how to touch and melt; he makes us weep, absolutely

shed tears ; before reading him we did not know there was so much pity in the heart. The grief of a child, who wishes to be loved by his father, and whom his father does not love ; the despairing love and slow death of a poor half-imbecile young man : all these pictures of secret grief leave an ineffaceable impression. The tears which he sheds are genuine, and compassion is their only source. Balzac, George Sand, Stendhal have also recorded human miseries ; is it possible to write without recording them ? But they do not seek them out, they hit upon them ; they do not dream of displaying them to us ; they were going elsewhere, and met them on their way. They love art better than men. They delight only in setting in motion the springs of passions, in combining large systems of events, in constructing powerful characters : they do not write from sympathy with the wretched, but from love of beauty. When we have finished George Sand's *Mauprat*, our emotion is not pure sympathy ; we feel, in addition, a deep admiration for the greatness and the generosity of love. When we have come to the end of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, our heart is pained by the tortures of that anguish ; but the astonishing inventiveness, the accumulation of facts, the abundance of general ideas, the force of analysis, transport us into the world of science, and our painful sympathy is calmed by the spectacle of this physiology of the heart. Dickens never calms our sympathy ; he selects subjects in which it alone, and more than elsewhere, is unfolded : the long oppression of children persecuted and starved by their schoolmaster ; the life of the factory-hand Stephen, robbed and degraded by his wife, driven away by his fellow-workmen, accused of theft, lingering six



days at the bottom of a pit into which he has fallen, maimed, consumed by fever, and dying when he is at length discovered. Rachael, his only friend, is there; and his delirium, his cries, the storm of despair in which Dickens envelopes his characters, have prepared the way for the painful picture of this resigned death. The bucket brings up a poor, crushed human creature, and we see "the pale, worn, patient face looking up to the sky, whilst the right hand, shattered and hanging down, seems as if waiting to be taken by another hand." Yet he smiles, and feebly said "Rachael!" She stooped down, and bent over him until her eyes were between his and the sky, for he could not so much as turn them to look at her. Then in broken words he tells her of his long agony. Ever since he was born he has met with nothing but misery and injustice; it is the rule—the weak suffer, and are made to suffer. This pit into which he had fallen "has cost hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives—fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an' thousands, an' keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. . . . The men that works in pits . . . ha' pray'n an' pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children, that they loves as well as gentefok loves theirs;" all in vain. "When the pit was in work, it killed wi'out need; when 't is let alone, it kills wi'out need."<sup>1</sup> Stephen says this without anger, quietly, merely as the truth. He has his calumniator before him; he does not get angry, accuses no one; he only charges old Gradgrind to clear him and make his name good with all men as soon as he shall be dead. His heart is up there in heaven, where

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Times*, bk. 3, ch. vi.

he has seen a star shining. In his agony, on his bed of stones, he has gazed upon it, and the tender and touching glance of the divine star has calmed, by its mystical serenity, the anguish of mind and body.

“ ‘It ha’ shined upon me,’ he said reverently, ‘in my pain and trouble down below. It ha’ shined into my mind. I ha’ lookn at’t and thowt o’ thee, Rachael, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa, above a bit, I hope. If soom ha’ been wantin’ in unnerstan’in’ me better, I, too, ha’ been wantin’ in unnerstan’in’ them better.

“ ‘In my pain an’ trouble, lookin’ up yonder,—wi’ it shinin’ on me.—I ha’ seen more clear, and ha’ made it my dyin’ prayer that aw th’ world may on’y coom toogether more, an’ get a better unnerstan’in’ o’ one another, than when I were in’t my own weak seln.

“ ‘Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin’ on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour’s home. I awmust think it be the very star!’

“They carried him very gently along the fields, and down the lanes, and over the wide landscape; Rachael always holding the hand in hers. Very few whispers broke the mournful silence. It was soon a funeral procession. The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer’s rest.”<sup>1</sup>

This same writer is the most railing, the most comic, the most jocose of English authors. And it is moreover a singular gaiety! It is the only kind which would harmonise with this impassioned sensibility. There is a laughter akin to tears. Satire is the sister of elegy: if the second pleads for the oppressed, the first combats the oppressors. Feeling painfully all the wrongs that are committed, and the vices that are practised, Dickens

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Times*, bk. 3, ch. vi.

avenges himself by ridicule. He does not paint, he punishes. Nothing could be more damaging than those long chapters of sustained irony, in which the sarcasm is pressed, line after line, more sanguinary and piercing in the chosen adversary. There are five or six against the Americans,—their venal newspapers, their drunken journalists, their cheating speculators, their women authors, their coarseness, their familiarity, their insolence, their brutality,—enough to captivate an absolutist, and to justify the French Liberal who, returning from New York, embraced with tears in his eyes the first gendarme whom he saw on landing at Havre. Starting of commercial companies, interviews between a member of Parliament and his constituents, instructions of a member of the House of Commons to his secretary, the outward display of great banking-houses, the laying of the first stone of a public building, every kind of ceremony and lie of English society, are depicted with the fire and bitterness of Hogarth. There are parts where the comic element is so violent, that it has the semblance of vengeance,—as the story of Jonas Chuzzlewit. “The very first word which this excellent boy learnt to spell was gain, and the second (when he came into two syllables) was money.” This fine education had unfortunately produced two results: first, that, “having been long taught by his father to overreach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of overreaching that venerable monitor himself;” secondly, that being taught to regard everything as a matter of property, “he had gradually come to look with impatience on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate,” who would be very well “secured,” in that particular description of strong-box which is

commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.<sup>1</sup> "Is that my father snoring, Pecksniff?" asked Jonas: "tread upon his foot; will you be so good? The foot next you is the gouty one."<sup>2</sup> Young Chuzzlewit is introduced to us with this mark of attention; we may judge by this of his other feelings. In reality, Dickens is gloomy, like Hogarth; but, like Hogarth, he makes us burst with laughter by the buffoonery of his invention and the violence of his caricatures. He pushes his characters to absurdity with unwonted boldness. Pecksniff hits off moral phrases and sentimental actions in so grotesque a manner, that they make him extravagant. Never were heard such monstrous oratorical displays. Sheridan had already painted an English hypocrite, Joseph Surface; but he differs from Pecksniff as much as a portrait of the eighteenth century differs from a cartoon of *Punch*. Dickens makes hypocrisy so deformed and monstrous, that his hypocrite ceases to resemble a man; we would call him one of those fantastic figures whose nose is greater than his body. This exaggerated comicality springs from excess of imagination. Dickens uses the same spring throughout. The better to make us see the object he shows us, he dazzles the reader's eyes with it; but the reader is amused by this irregular fancy: the fire of the execution makes him forget that the scene is improbable, and he laughs heartily as he listens to the undertaker, Mould, enumerating the consolations which filial piety, well backed by money, may find in his shop. What grief could not be softened by

"Four horses to each vehicle . . . velvet trappings . . . drivers in cloth cloaks and top-boots . . . the plumage of the

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

ostrich, dyed black . . . any number of walking attendants, dressed in the first style of funeral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass . . . a place in Westminster Abbey itself, if he choose to invest it in such a purchase. Oh ! do not let us say that gold is dross, when it can buy such things as these.' 'Ay, Mrs. Gamp, you are right,' rejoined the undertaker. 'We should be an honoured calling. We do good by stealth, and blush to have it mentioned in our little bills. How much consolation may I—even I,' cried Mr. Mould, 'have diffused among my fellow-creatures by means of my four long-tailed prancers, never harnessed under ten pund ten !'"<sup>1</sup>

Usually Dickens remains grave whilst drawing his caricatures. English wit consists in saying very jocular things in a solemn manner. Tone and ideas are then in contrast ; every contrast makes a strong impression. Dickens loves to produce them, and his public to hear them.

If at times he forgets to castigate his neighbour, if he tries to sport, to amuse himself, he is not the more happy for all that. The chief element of the English character is its want of happiness. The ardent and tenacious imagination of Dickens is impressed with things too firmly, to pass lightly and gaily over the surface. He leans too heavily on them, he penetrates, works into, hollows them out ; all these violent actions are efforts, and all efforts are sufferings. To be happy, a man must be light-minded, as a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, or sensual, as an Italian of the sixteenth ; a man must not get anxious about things, if he wishes to enjoy them. Dickens does get anxious, and does not enjoy. Let us take a little comical accident, such as we meet with in the street—a gust of

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xix.

wind, which blows about the garments of a street-porter. Scaramouche will grin with good humour; Le Sage smile like a diverted man; both will pass by and think no more of it. Dickens muses over it for half a page. He sees so clearly all the effects of the wind, he puts himself so entirely in its place, he imagines for it a will so impassioned and precise, he shakes the clothes of the poor man hither and thither so violently and so long, he turns the gust into a tempest, into a persecution so great, that we are made giddy; and even whilst we laugh, we feel in ourselves too much emotion and compassion to laugh heartily:

“And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was, to wait in, in the winter-time, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner—especially the east wind—as if it had sallied forth, express, from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And often-times it seemed to come upon him sooner than it had expected; for, bouncing round the corner, and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again, as if it cried: ‘Why, here he is!’ Incontinently his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy’s garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation; and Toby himself, all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and touzled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet, as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle that he wasn’t carried up bodily into the air as a colony of frogs or snails or other portable creatures sometimes are, and rained down again, to the great astonishment of the natives, on some strange corner of the world where ticket-porters are unknown.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Chimes*, the first quarter.

If now we would picture in a glance this imagination,—so lucid, so violent, so passionately fixed on the object selected, so deeply touched by little things, so wholly attached to the details and sentiments of vulgar life, so fertile in incessant emotions, so powerful in rousing painful pity, sarcastic raillery, nervous gaiety,—we must fancy a London street on a rainy winter's night. The flickering light of the gas dazzles our eyes, streams through the shop windows, floods over the passing forms; and its harsh light, settling upon their contracted features, brings out, with endless detail and damaging force, their wrinkles, deformities, troubled expression. If in this close and dirty crowd we discover the fresh face of a young girl, this artificial light covers it with false and excessive lights and shades; it makes it stand out against the rainy and cold blackness with a strange halo. The mind is struck with wonder; but we carry our hand to our eyes to cover them, and, whilst we admire the force of this light, we involuntarily think of the real country sun and the tranquil beauty of day.

## § 2.—THE PUBLIC

### I.

Plant this talent on English soil; the literary opinion of the country will direct its growth and explain its fruits. For this public opinion is its private opinion; it does not submit to it as to an external constraint, but feels it inwardly as an inner persuasion; it does not hinder, but develops it, and only repeats aloud what it said to itself in a whisper.

The counsels of this public taste are somewhat like

this; the more powerful because they agree with its natural inclination, and urge it upon its special course:—

“Be moral. All your novels must be such as may be read by young girls. We are practical minds, and we would not have literature corrupt practical life. We believe in family life, and we would not have literature paint the passions which attack family life. We are Protestants, and we have preserved something of the severity of our fathers against enjoyment and passions. Amongst these, love is the worst. Beware of resembling in this respect the most illustrious of our neighbours. Love is the hero of all George Sand’s novels. Married or not, she thinks it beautiful, holy, sublime in itself; and she says so. Don’t believe this; and if you do believe it, don’t say it. It is a bad example. Love thus represented makes marriage a secondary matter. It ends in marriage, or destroys it, or does without it, according to circumstances; but whatever it does, it treats it as inferior; it does not recognise any holiness in it, beyond that which love gives it, and holds it impious if it is excluded. A novel of this sort is a plea for the heart, the imagination, enthusiasm, nature; but it is also often a plea against society and law: we do not suffer society and law to be touched, directly or indirectly. To present a feeling as divine, to make all institutions bow before it, to carry it through a series of generous actions, to sing with a sort of heroic inspiration the combats which it wages and the attacks which it sustains, to enrich it with all the force of eloquence, to crown it with all the flowers of poetry, is to paint the life, which it results in, as more beautiful and loftier than others, to set it



far above all passions and duties, in a sublime region, on a throne, whence it shines as a light, a consolation, a hope, and draws all hearts towards it. Perhaps this is the world of artists; it is not the world of ordinary men. Perhaps it is true to nature; we make nature give way before the interests of society. George Sand paints impassioned women; paint you for us good women. George Sand makes us desire to be in love; do you make us desire to be married.

"This has its disadvantages without doubt; art suffers by it, if the public gains. Though your characters give the best examples, your works will be of less value. No matter; you may console yourself with the thought that you are moral. Your lovers will be uninteresting; for the only interest natural to their age is the violence of passion, and you cannot paint passion. In *Nicholas Nickleby* you will show two good young men, like all young men, marrying two good young women, like all young women; in *Martin Chuzzlewit* you will show two more good young men, perfectly resembling the other two, marrying again two good young women, perfectly resembling the other two; in *Dombey and Son* there will be only one good young man and one good young woman. Otherwise there is no difference. And so on. The number of your marriages is marvellous, and you marry enough couples to people England. What is more curious still, they are all disinterested, and the young man and young woman snap their fingers at money as sincerely as in the *Opéra Comique*. You will not cease to dwell on the pretty shynesses of the betrothed, the tears of the mothers, the tears of all the guests, the amusing and touching scenes of the dinner table; you will create a crowd of family pictures.

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all touching, and almost all as agreeable as screen-paintings. The reader is moved; he thinks he is beholding the innocent loves and virtuous attentions of a little boy and girl of ten. He should like to say to them: 'Good little people, continue to be very proper.' But the chief interest will be for young girls, who will learn in how devoted and yet suitable a manner a lover ought to court his intended. If you venture on a seduction, as in *Copperfield*, you do not relate the progress, ardour, intoxication of love; you only depict its miseries, despair, and remorse. If in *Copperfield* and the *Cricket on the Hearth* you present a troubled marriage and a suspected wife, you hasten to restore peace to the marriage and innocence to the wife; and you will deliver, by her mouth, so splendid a eulogy on marriage, that it might serve for a model to Emile Augier.<sup>1</sup> If in *Hard Times* the wife treads on the border of crime, she shall check herself there. If in *Dombey and Son* she flees from her husband's roof, she remains pure, only incurs the appearance of crime, and treats her lover in such a manner that the reader wishes to be the husband. If, lastly, in *Copperfield* you relate the emotions and follies of love, you will rally this poor affection, depict its littlenesses, not venture to make us hear the ardent, generous, undisciplined blast of the all-powerful passion; you turn it into a toy for good children, or a pretty marriage-trinket. But marriage will compensate you. Your genius of observation and taste for details is exercised on the scenes of domestic life; you will excel in the picture of a fireside, family

<sup>1</sup> A living French author, whose dramas are all said to have a moral purpose.—*TR.*

prattle, children on the knees of their mother, a husband watching by lamplight by the side of his sleeping wife, the heart full of joy and courage, because it feels that it is working for its own. You will describe charming or grave portraits of women; of Dora, who after marriage continues to be a little girl, whose pouting, prettinesses, childishnesses, laughter, make the house gay, like the chirping of a bird; Esther, whose perfect goodness and divine innocence cannot be affected by trials or years; Agnes, so calm, patient, sensible, pure, worthy of respect, a very model of a wife, sufficient in herself to claim for marriage the respect which we demand for it. And when it is necessary to show the beauty of these duties, the greatness of this conjugal love, the depth of the sentiment which ten years of confidence, cares, and reciprocal devotion have created, you will find in your sensibility, so long constrained, speeches as pathetic as the strongest words of love.<sup>1</sup>

"The worst novels are not those which glorify love. A man must live across the Channel to dare what the French have dared. In England, some admire Balzac; but no man would tolerate him. Some pretend that he is not immoral; but every one will recognise that he always and everywhere makes morality an abstraction. George Sand has only celebrated one passion; Balzac has celebrated them all. He has considered them as forces; and holding that force is beautiful, he has supported them by their causes, surrounded them by their circumstances, developed them in their effects, pushed them to an extreme, and

<sup>1</sup> *David Copperfield*, ch. lxx. ; the scene between the doctor and his wife.

magnified them so as to make them into sublime monsters, more systematic and more true than the truth. We do not admit that a man is only an artist, and nothing else. We would not have him separate himself from his conscience, and lose sight of the practical. We will never consent to see that such is the leading feature of our own Shakspeare; we will not recognise that he, like Balzac, brings his heroes to crime and monomania, and that, like him, he lives in a land of pure logic and imagination. We have changed much since the sixteenth century, and we condemn now what we approved formerly. We would not have the reader interested in a miser, an ambitious man, a rake. And he is interested in them when the writer, neither praising nor blaming, sets himself to unfold the mood, training, shape of the head, and habits of mind which have impressed in him this primitive inclination, to prove the necessity of its effects, to lead it through all its stages, to show the greater power which age and contentment give, to expose the irresistible fall which hurls man into madness or death. The reader, caught by this reasoning, admires the work which it has produced, and forgets to be indignant against the personage created. He says, What a splendid miser! and thinks not of the evils which avarice causes. He becomes a philosopher and an artist, and remembers not that he is an upright man. Always recollect that you are such, and renounce the beauties which may flourish on this evil soil.

“ Amongst these the first is greatness. A man must be interested in passions to comprehend their full effect, to count all their springs, to describe their whole course, They are diseases; if a man is content to blame them

he will never know them ; if you are not a physiologist, if you are not enamoured of them, if you do not make your heroes out of them, if you do not start with pleasure at the sight of a fine feature of avarice, as at the sight of a valuable symptom, you will not be able to unfold their vast system, and to display their fatal greatness. You will not have this immoral merit ; and, moreover, it does not suit your species of mind. Your extreme sensibility, and ever-ready irony, must needs be exercised ; you have not sufficient calmness to penetrate to the depths of a character, you prefer to weep over or to rail at it ; you lay the blame on it, make it your friend or foe, render it touching or odious ; you do not depict it ; you are too impassioned, and not enough inquisitive. On the other hand, the tenacity of your imagination, the vehemence and fixity with which you impress your thought into the detail you wish to grasp, limit your knowledge, arrest you in a single feature, prevent you from reaching all the parts of a soul, and from sounding its depths. Your imagination is too lively, too meagre. These, then, are the characters you will outline. You will grasp a personage in a single attitude, you will see of him only that, and you will impose it upon him from beginning to end. His face will always have the same expression, and this expression will be almost always a grimace. Your personages will have a sort of knack which will not quit them. Miss Mercy will laugh at every word ; Mark Tapley will say ' jolly ' in every scene ; Mrs. Gamp will be ever talking of Mrs. Harris ; Dr. Chillip will not venture a single action free from timidity ; Mr. Micawber will speak through three volumes the same kind of emphatic phrases, and will pass five or six times, with

comical suddenness, from joy to grief. Each of your characters will be a vice, a virtue, a ridicule personified; and the passion, with which you endow it, will be so frequent, so invariable, so absorbing, that it will no longer be like a living man, but an abstraction in man's clothes. The French have a *Tartuffe* like your *Pecksniff*, but the hypocrisy which he represents has not destroyed the other traits of his character; if he adds to the comedy by his vice, he belongs to humanity by his nature. He has, besides his ridiculous feature, a character and a mood; he is coarse, strong, red in the face, brutal, sensual; the vehemence of his blood makes him bold; his boldness makes him calm; his boldness, his calm, his quick decision, his scorn of men, make him a great politician. When he has entertained the public through five acts, he still offers to the psychologist and the physician more than one subject of study. Your *Pecksniff* will offer nothing to these. He will only serve to instruct and amuse the public. He will be a living satire of hypocrisy, and nothing more. If you give him a taste for brandy, it is gratuitously; in the mood which you assign to him, nothing requires it; he is so steeped in oily hypocrisy, in softness, in a flowing style, in literary phrases, in tender morality, that the rest of his nature has disappeared; it is a mask, and not a man. But this mask is so grotesque and energetic, that it will be useful to the public, and will diminish the number of hypocrites. It is our end and yours, and the list of your characters will have rather the effect of a book of satires than of a portrait gallery.

"For the same reason, these satires, though united, will continue effectually detached, and will not constitute a genuine collection. You began with essays, and

your larger novels are only essays, tagged together. The only means of composing a natural and solid whole is to write the history of a passion or of a character, to take them up at their birth, to see them increase, alter, become destroyed, to understand the inner necessity for their development. You do not follow this development; you always keep your character in the same attitude; he is a miser, or a hypocrite, or a good man to the end, and always after the same fashion: thus he has no history. You can only change the circumstances in which he is met with, you do not change him; he remains motionless, and at every shock that touches him, emits the same sound. The variety of events which you contrive is therefore only an amusing phantasmagoria; they have no connection, they do not form a system, they are but a heap. You will only write lives, adventures, memoirs, sketches, collections of scenes, and you will not be able to compose an action. But if the literary taste of your nation, added to the natural direction of your genius, imposes upon you moral intentions, forbids you the lofty depiction of characters, vetoes the composition of united aggregates, it presents to your observation, sensibility, and satire, a succession of original figures which belong only to England, which, drawn by your hand, will form a unique gallery, and which, with the stamp of your genius, will offer that of your country and of your time."

### § 3.—THE CHARACTERS.

#### I.

Take away the grotesque characters, who are only introduced to fill up and to excite laughter, and you will

find that all Dickens' characters belong to two classes—people who have feelings and emotions, and people who have none. He contrasts the souls which nature creates with those which society deforms. One of his last novels, *Hard Times*, is an abstract of all the rest. He there exalts instinct above reason, intuition of heart above positive knowledge; he attacks education built on statistics, figures, and facts; overwhelms the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule; and the aristocrat; falls foul of manufacturing towns, combats the pride, harshness, selfishness of the merchant towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body in an artificial atmosphere, and the mind in a factitious existence. He seeks out poor artisans, mountebanks, a foundling, and crushes beneath their common sense, generosity, delicacy, courage, and gentleness, the false science, false happiness, and false virtue of the rich and powerful who despise them. He satirises oppressive society; mourns over oppressed nature; and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development.

## II.

The first fruits of English society is hypocrisy. It ripens here under the double breath of religion and morality; we know their popularity and sway across the Channel. In a country where it is shocking to laugh on Sunday, where the gloomy Puritan has preserved something of his old rancour against happiness, where the critics of ancient history insert dissertations on the relative virtue of Nebuchadnezzar, it is natural that the appearance of morality should be



serviceable. It is a needful coin : those who lack good money coin bad ; and the more public opinion declares it precious, the more it is counterfeited. This vice is therefore English. Mr. Pecksniff is not found in France. His speech would disgust Frenchmen. If they have an affectation, it is not of virtue, but of vice : if they wish to succeed, they would be wrong to speak of their principles : they prefer to confess their weaknesses ; and if they have quacks, they are boasters of immorality. They had their hypocrites once, but it was when religion was popular. Since Voltaire, Tartuffe is impossible. Frenchmen no longer try to affect a piety which would deceive no one and lead to nothing. Hypocrisy comes and goes, varying with the state of morals, religion, and mind ; we can see, then, how Pecksniff's suits the dispositions of his country. English religion is not very dogmatical, but wholly moral. Therefore Pecksniff does not, like Tartuffe, utter theological phrases ; he expands altogether in philanthropic tirades. He has progressed with the age ; he has become a humanitarian philosopher. He calls his daughters *Mercy* and *Charity*. He is tender, he is kind, he gives vent to domestic effusions. He innocently exhibits, when visited, charming domestic scenes ; he displays his paternal heart, marital sentiments, the kindly feeling of a good master. The family virtues are honoured now-a-days ; he must muffle himself therewith. Orgon formerly said, as taught by Tartuffe :

" My brother, children, mother, wife might die !  
You think I'll care ; no surely, no ! not I ! " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> " Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère, et femme  
Que je m'en soucierais autant que de cela."

These lines, said by Orgon to his brother-in-law Cléante, are from Molière's *Tartuffe*, i. vi.

Modern virtue and English piety think otherwise; we must not despise this world in view of the next; we must improve it. Tartuffe speaks of his hair-shirt and his discipline; Pecksniff, of his comfortable little parlour, of the charm of friendship, the beauties of nature. He tries to make men "dwell in unity." He is like a member of the Peace Society. He develops the most touching considerations on the benefits and beauties of union among men. It will be impossible to hear him without being affected. Men are refined now-a-days, they have read much elegiac poetry; their sensibility is more active; they can no longer be deceived by the coarse impudence of Tartuffe. This is why Mr. Pecksniff will use gestures of sublime long-suffering, smiles of ineffable compassion, starts, free and easy movements, graces, tendernesses which will seduce the most reserved and charm the most delicate. The English in their Parliament, meetings, associations, public ceremonies, have learned the oratorical phraseology, the abstract terms, the style of political economy, of the newspaper and the prospectus. Pecksniff talks like a prospectus. He possesses its obscurity, its wordiness, and its emphasis. He seems to soar above the earth, in the region of pure ideas, in the bosom of truth. He resembles an apostle, brought up in the *Times* office. He spouts general ideas on every occasion. He finds a moral lesson in the ham and eggs he has just eaten. As he folds his napkin, he rises to lofty contemplations:

"Even the worldly goods of which we have just disposed, even they have their moral. See how they come and go. Every pleasure is transitory."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. ii.

“‘The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term,’ said Mr. Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, ‘and know that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind !’”<sup>1</sup>

We recognise a new species of hypocrisy. Vices, like virtues, change in every age.

The practical, as well as the moral spirit, is English ; by commerce, labour, and government, this people has acquired the taste and talent for business ; this is why they regard the French as children and madmen. The excess of this disposition is the destruction of imagination and sensibility. Man becomes a speculative machine, in which figures and facts are set in array ; he denies the life of the mind, and the joys of the heart ; he sees in the world nothing but loss and gain ; he becomes hard, harsh, greedy, and avaricious ; he treats men as machinery ; on a certain day he finds himself simply a merchant, banker, statistician ; he has ceased to be a man. Dickens has multiplied portraits of the positive man—Ralph Nickleby, Scrooge, Anthony Chuzzlewit, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Alderman Cute, Mr. Murdstone and his sister, Bounderby, Gradgrind : we can find them in all his novels. Some are so by education, others by nature ; but all are odious, for they all rail at and destroy kindness, sympathy, compassion, disinterested

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. viii.

affections, religious emotions, a fanciful enthusiasm, all that is lovely in man. They oppress children, strike women, starve the poor, insult the wretched. The best are machines of polished steel, methodically performing their official duties, and not knowing that they make others suffer. These kinds of men are not found in France. Their rigidity is not in the French character. They are produced in England by a school which has its philosophy, its great men, its glory, and which has never been established amongst the French. More than once, it is true, French writers have depicted avaricious men, men of business, and shopkeepers : Balzac is full of them ; but he explains them by their imbecility, or makes them monsters, like Grandet and Gobseck. Those of Dickens constitute a real class, and represent a national vice. Read this passage of *Hard Times*, and see if, body and soul, Mr. Gradgrind is not wholly English :

“ ‘ Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts : nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir ! ’ ”

“ The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The

emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum-pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was—all helped the emphasis.

“‘In this life we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!’

“The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.<sup>1</sup>

“‘THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir! A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir!’

“In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words ‘boys and girls’ for ‘sir,’ Thomas Gradgrind now pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Times*, book i. ch. i.

sented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts."<sup>1</sup>

Another fault arising from the habit of commanding and striving is pride. It abounds in an aristocratic country, and no one has more soundly rated aristocracy than Dickens; all his portraits are sarcasms. James Harthouse, a dandy disgusted with everything, chiefly with himself, and rightly so; Lord Frederick Verisopht, a poor duped idiot, brutalised with drink, whose wit consists in staring at men and sucking his cane; Lord Feenix, a sort of mechanism of parliamentary phrases, out of order, and hardly able to finish the ridiculous periods into which he always takes care to lapse; Mrs. Skewton, a hideous old ruin, a coquette to the last, demanding rose-coloured curtains for her death-bed, and parading her daughter through all the drawing-rooms of England, in order to sell her to some vain husband; Sir John Chester, a wretch of high society, who, for fear of compromising himself, refuses to save his natural son, and refuses it with all kinds of airs, as he finishes his chocolate. But the most complete and most English picture of the aristocratic spirit is the portrait of a London merchant, Mr. Dombey.

In France people do not look for types among the merchants, but they are found among that class in England, as forcible as in the proudest châteaux. Mr. Dombey loves his house as if he were a nobleman, as much as himself. If he neglects his daughter and longs for a son, it is to perpetuate the old name of his bank. He has his ancestors in commerce, and he likes to have his descendants in the same branch of business. He maintains traditions, and continues a

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Times*, book i. ch. ii.

power. At this height of opulence, and with this scope of action, he is a prince, and with a prince's position he has his feelings. We see there a character which could only be produced in a country whose commerce embraces the globe, where merchants are potentates, where a company of merchants has trafficked in continents, maintained wars, destroyed kingdoms, founded an empire of a hundred million men. The pride of such a man is not petty, but terrible; it is so calm and high, that to find a parallel we must read again the *Mémoires* of the Duke of Saint Simon. Mr. Dombey has always commanded, and it does not enter his mind that he could yield to any one or anything. He receives flattery as a tribute to which he has a right, and sees men beneath him, at a vast distance, as beings made to beseech and obey him. His second wife, proud Edith Skewton, resists and scorns him; the pride of the merchant is pitted against the pride of the high-born woman, and the restrained outbursts of this growing opposition reveal an intensity of passion, which souls thus born and bred alone can feel. Edith, to avenge herself, flees on the anniversary of her marriage, and gives herself the appearance of being an adultress. It is then that his inflexible pride asserts itself in all its rigidity. He has driven out of the house his daughter, whom he believes the accomplice of his wife; he forbids the one or the other to be recalled to his memory; he commands his sister and his friends to be silent; he receives guests with the same tone and the same coldness. With despair in his heart, and feeling bitterly the insult offered to him by his wife, the conscientiousness of his failure, and the idea of public ridicule, he remains as firm, as haughty, as calm

as ever. He launches out more recklessly in speculations, and is ruined; he is on the point of suicide. Hitherto all was well: the bronze column continued whole and unbroken; but the exigencies of public morality mar the idea of the book. His daughter arrives in the nick of time. She entreats him; his feelings get the better of him, she carries him off; he becomes the best of fathers, and spoils a fine novel.

### III.

Let us look at some different personages. In contrast with these bad and factitious characters, produced by national institutions, we find good creatures such as nature made them; and first, children.

We have none in French literature. Racine's little Joas could only exist in a piece composed for the ladies' college of Saint Cyr; the little child speaks like a prince's son, with noble and acquired phrases, as if repeating his catechism. Now-a-days these portraits are only seen in France in New-year's books, written as models for good children. Dickens painted his with special gratification; he did not think of edifying the public, and he has charmed it. All his children are of extreme sensibility; they love much, and they crave to be loved. To understand this gratification of the painter, and this choice of characters, we must think of their physical type. English children have a colour so fresh, a complexion so delicate, a skin so transparent, eyes so blue and pure, that they are like beautiful flowers. No wonder if a novelist loves them, lends to their soul a sensibility and innocence which shine forth from their looks, if he thinks that these frail and charming roses are crushed by the coarse



hands which try to bend them. We must also imagine to ourselves the households in which they grow up. When at five o'clock the merchant and the clerk leave their office and their business, they return as quickly as possible to the pretty cottage, where their children have played all day on the lawn. The fireside by which they will pass the evening is a sanctuary, and domestic tenderness is the only poetry they need. A child deprived of these affections and this happiness seems to be deprived of the air we breathe, and the novelist does not find a volume too much to explain its unhappiness. Dickens has recorded it in ten volumes, and at last he has written the history of *David Copperfield*. David is loved by his mother, and by an honest servant girl, Peggotty; he plays with her in the garden; he watches her sew; he reads to her the natural history of crocodiles; he fears the hens and geese, which strut in a menacing and ferocious manner in the yard; he is perfectly happy. His mother marries again, and all changes. The father-in-law, Mr. Murdstone, and his sister Jane, are harsh, methodical, and cold beings. Poor little David is every moment wounded by harsh words. He dare not speak or move; he is afraid to kiss his mother; he feels himself weighed down, as by a leaden cloak, by the cold looks of the new master and mistress. He falls back on himself; mechanically studies the lessons assigned him; cannot learn them, so great is his dread of not knowing them. He is whipped, shut up with bread and water in a lonely room. He is terrified by night, and fears himself. He asks himself whether in fact he is not bad or wicked, and weeps. This incessant terror, hopeless and issueless, the spectacle of this wounded

sensibility and stupefied intelligence, the long anxieties, the sleepless nights, the solitude of the poor imprisoned child, his passionate desire to kiss his mother or to weep on the breast of his nurse,—all this is sad to see. These children's griefs are as heart-felt as the sorrows of a man. It is the history of a frail plant, which was flourishing in a warm air, beneath a mild sun, and which, suddenly transplanted to the snow, sheds its leaves and withers.

The working-classes are like children, dependent, not very cultivated, akin to nature, and liable to oppression. And so Dickens extols them. That is not new in France; the novels of Eugène Sue have given us more than one example, and the theme is as old as Rousseau; but in the hands of the English writer it has acquired a singular force. His heroes possess feelings so delicate, and are so self-sacrificing, that we cannot admire them sufficiently. They have nothing vulgar but their pronunciation; the rest is but nobility and generosity. We see a mountebank abandon his daughter, his only joy, for fear of injuring her in any way. A young woman devotes herself to save the unworthy wife of a man who loves her, and whom she loves; the man dies; she continues, from pure self-sacrifice, to care for the degraded creature. A poor waggoner, who thinks his wife unfaithful, loudly pronounces her innocent, and all his vengeance is to think only of loading her with tenderness and kindness. None, according to Dickens, feel so strongly as they do the happiness of loving and being loved—the pure joys of domestic life. None have so much compassion for those poor deformed and infirm creatures whom they so often bring into the world, and who seem only born to die. None have a juster and more inflexible moral sense. I confess even that

Dickens' heroes unfortunately resemble the indignant fathers of French melodramas. When old Peggotty learns that his niece is seduced, he sets off, stick in hand, and walks over France, Germany, and Italy, to find her and bring her back to duty. But above all, they have an English sentiment, which fails in Frenchmen: they are Christians. It is not only women, as in France, who take refuge in the idea of another world; men turn also their thoughts towards it. In England, where there are so many sects, and every one chooses his own, each one believes in the religion he has made for himself; and this noble sentiment raises still higher the throne upon which the uprightness of their resolution and the delicacy of their heart has placed them.

In reality, the novels of Dickens can all be reduced to one phrase, to wit: Be good, and love; there is genuine joy only in the emotions of the heart; sensibility is the whole man. Leave science to the wise, pride to the nobles, luxury to the rich; have compassion on humble wretchedness; the smallest and most despised being may in himself be worth as much as thousands of the powerful and the proud. Take care not to bruise the delicate souls which flourish in all conditions, under all costumes, in all ages. Believe that humanity, pity, forgiveness, are the finest things in man; believe that intimacy, expansion, tenderness, tears, are the sweetest things in the world. To live is nothing; to be powerful, learned, illustrious, is little; to be useful is not enough. He alone has lived and is a man who has wept at the remembrance of a kind action which he himself has performed or received.

## IV.

We do not believe that this contrast between the weak and the strong, or this outcry against society in favour of nature, are the caprice of an artist or the chance of the moment. When we penetrate deeply into the history of English genius, we find that its primitive foundation was impassioned sensibility, and that its natural expression was lyrical exaltation. Both were brought from Germany, and make up the literature existing before the Conquest. After an interval you find them again in the sixteenth century, when the French literature, introduced from Normandy, had passed away : they are the very soul of the nation. But the education of this soul was opposite to its genius ; its history contradicted its nature ; and its primitive inclination has clashed with all the great events which it has created or suffered. The chance of a victorious invasion and an imposed aristocracy, whilst establishing the enjoyment of political liberty, has impressed on the character habits of strife and pride. The chance of an insular position, the necessity of commerce, the abundant possession of the first materials for industry, have developed the practical faculties and the positive mind. The acquisition of these habits, faculties, and mind, to which must be added former hostile feelings to Rome, and an inveterate hatred against an oppressive church, has given birth to a proud and reasoning religion, replacing submission by independence, poetic theology by practical morality, and faith by discussion. Politics, business, and religion, like three powerful machines, have created a new man above the old. Stern dignity, self-command, the need of authority, severity in its exercise, strict

morality, without compromise or pity, a taste for figures and dry calculation, a dislike of facts not palpable and ideas not useful, ignorance of the invisible world, scorn of the weaknesses and tendernesses of the heart,—such are the dispositions which the stream of facts and the ascendancy of institutions tend to confirm in their souls. But poetry and domestic life prove that they have only half succeeded. The old sensibility, oppressed and perverted, still lives and works. The poet subsists under the Puritan, the trader, the statesman. The social man has not destroyed the natural man. This frozen crust, this unsociable pride, this rigid attitude, often cover a good and tender nature. It is the English mask of a German head; and when a talented writer, often a writer of genius, reaches the sensibility which is bruised or buried by education and national institutions, he moves his reader in the most inner depths, and becomes the master of all hearts.



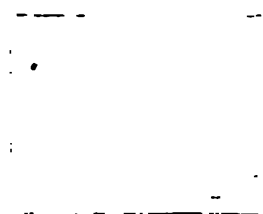
*CHARLES DICKENS*

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## CHAPTER II.

### *The Rebel continued—Thackeray.*

#### I.

THE novel of manners in England multiplies, and for this there are several reasons: first, it is born there, and every plant thrives well in its own soil; secondly, it is a natural outlet: there is no music in England as in Germany, or conversation as in France; and men who must think and feel find in it a means of feeling and thinking. On the other hand, women take part in it with eagerness; amidst the stagnation of gallantry and the coldness of religion, it gives scope for imagination and dreams. Finally, by its minute details and practical counsels, it opens up a career to the precise and moral mind. The critic thus is, as it were, swamped in this copiousness; he must select in order to grasp the whole, and confine himself to a few in order to embrace all.

In this crowd two men have appeared of superior talent, original and contrasted, popular on the same grounds, ministers to the same cause, moralists in comedy and drama, defenders of natural sentiments against social institutions; who, by the precision of their pictures, the depth of their observations, the succession and bitterness of their attacks, have renewed, with other views and in another style, the old combative spirit of Swift and Fielding.

One, more ardent, more expansive, wholly given up to rapture, an impassioned painter of crude and dazzling pictures, a lyric prose-writer, omnipotent in laughter and tears, plunged into fantastic invention, painful sensibility, vehement buffoonery; and by the boldness of his style, the excess of his emotions, the grotesque familiarity of his caricatures, he has displayed all the forces and weaknesses of an artist, all the audacities, all the successes, and all the oddities of the imagination.

The other, more contained, better informed and stronger, a lover of moral dissertations, a counsellor of the public, a sort of lay preacher, less bent on defending the poor, more bent on censuring man, has brought to the aid of satire a sustained common sense, a great knowledge of the heart, consummate cleverness, powerful reasoning, a treasure of meditated hatred, and has persecuted vice with all the weapons of reflection. By this contrast the one completes the other; and we may form an exact idea of English taste, by placing the portrait of William Makepeace Thackeray by the side of that of Charles Dickens.

### § 1.—THE SATIRIST.

#### II.

No wonder if in England a novelist writes satires. A gloomy and reflective man is impelled to it by his character; he is still further impelled by the surrounding manners. He is not permitted to contemplate passions as poetic powers; he is bidden to appreciate them as moral qualities. His pictures become sentences; he is a counsellor rather than an observer, a

judge rather than an artist. We see by what machinery Thackeray has changed novel into satire.

I open at random his three great works—*Pendennis*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Newcomes*. Every scene sets in relief a moral truth: the author desires that at every page we should form a judgment on vice and virtue; he has blamed or approved beforehand, and the dialogues or portraits are to him only means by which he adds our approbation to his approbation, our blame to his blame. He is giving us lessons; and beneath the sentiments which he describes, as beneath the events which he relates, we continually discover rules for our conduct and the intentions of a reformer.

On the first page of *Pendennis* we see the portrait of an old major, a man of the world, selfish and vain, seated comfortably in his club, at the table by the fire, and near the window, envied by surgeon Glowry, whom nobody ever invites, seeking in the records of aristocratic entertainments for his own name, gloriously placed amongst those of illustrious guests. A family letter arrives. Naturally he puts it aside and reads it carelessly last of all. He utters an exclamation of horror; his nephew wants to marry an actress. He has places booked in the coach (charging the sum which he disburses for the seats to the account of the widow and the young scapegrace of whom he is guardian), and hastens to save the young fool. If there were a low marriage, what would become of his invitations? The manifest conclusion is: Let us not be selfish, or vain, or fond of good living, like the major.

Chapter the second: *Pendennis*, the father of the young man in love, had "exercised the profession of apothecary and surgeon," but, being of good birth, his "secret ambition had always been to be a gentleman." He comes

into money; is called Doctor, marries the very distant relative of a lord, tries to get acquainted with high families. He boasts to the last day of his life of having been invited by Sir Pepin Ribstone to an entertainment. He buys a small estate, tries to sink the apothecary, and shows off in the new glory of a landed proprietor. Each of these details is a concealed or evident sarcasm, which says to the reader: "My good friend, remain the honest John Tomkins that you are; and for the love of your son and yourself, avoid taking the airs of a great nobleman."

Old Pendennis dies. His son, the noble heir of the domain, "Prince of Pendennis and Grand Duke of Fair Oaks," begins to reign over his mother, his cousin, and the servants. He sends wretched verses to the county papers, begins an epic poem, a tragedy in which sixteen persons die, a scathing history of the Jesuits, and defends church and king like a loyal Tory. He sighs after the ideal, wishes for an unknown maiden, and falls in love with an actress, a woman of thirty-two, who learns her parts mechanically, as ignorant and stupid as can be. Young folks, my dear friends, you are all affected, pretentious, dupes of yourselves and of others. Wait to judge the world until you have seen it, and do not think you are masters when you are scholars.

The lesson continues and lasts as long as the life of Arthur. Like Le Sage in *Gil Blas*, and Balzac in *Le Père Goriot*, the author of *Pendennis* depicts a young man having some talent, endowed with good feelings, even generous, desiring to make a name, whilst, at the same time, he falls in with the maxims of the world; but Le Sage only wished to amuse us, and Balzac only wished to stir our passions: Thackeray, from beginning to end labours to correct us.

This intention becomes still more evident if we examine in detail one of his dialogues and one of his pictures. We will not find there impartial energy, bent on copying nature, but attentive thoughtfulness, bent on transforming into satire objects, words, and events. All the words of the character are chosen and weighed, so as to be odious or ridiculous. It accuses itself, is studious to display vice, and behind its voice we hear the voice of the writer who judges, unmasks, and punishes it. Miss Crawley, a rich old woman, falls ill.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Bute Crawley, her relative, hastens to save her, and to save the inheritance. Her aim is to have excluded from the will a nephew, Captain Rawdon, an old favourite, presumptive heir of the old lady. This Rawdon is a stupid guardsman, a frequenter of taverns, a too clever gambler, a duellist, and a *roué*. Fancy the capital opportunity for Mrs. Bute, the respectable mother of a family, the worthy spouse of a clergyman, accustomed to write her husband's sermons ! From sheer virtue she hates Captain Rawdon, and will not suffer that such a good sum of money should fall into such bad hands. Moreover, are we not responsible for our families ? and is it not for us to publish the faults of our relatives ? It is our strict duty, and Mrs. Bute acquits herself of hers conscientiously. She collects edifying stories of her nephew, and therewith she edifies the aunt. He has ruined so and so ; he has wronged such a woman. He has duped this tradesman ; he has killed this husband. And above all, unworthy man, he has mocked his aunt ! Will that generous lady

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*. [Unless the original octavo edition is mentioned, the translator has always used the collected edition of Thackeray's works in small octavo, 1855-1868, 14 vols.]

continue to cherish such a viper? Will she suffer her numberless sacrifices to be repaid by such ingratitude and such ridicule? We can imagine the ecclesiastical eloquence of Mrs. Bute. Seated at the foot of the bed, she keeps the patient in sight, plies her with draughts, enlivens her with terrible sermons, and mounts guard at the door against the probable invasion of the heir. The siege was well conducted, the legacy attacked so obstinately must be yielded up; the virtuous fingers of the matron grasped beforehand and by anticipation the substantial heap of shining sovereigns. And yet a carping spectator might have found some faults in her management. Mrs. Bute managed rather too well. She forgot that a woman persecuted with sermons, handled like a bale of goods, regulated like a clock, might take a dislike to so harassing an authority. What is worse, she forgot that a timid old woman, confined to the house, overwhelmed with preachings, poisoned with pills, might die before having changed her will, and leave all, alas, to her scoundrelly nephew. Instructive and formidable example! Mrs. Bute, the honour of her sex, the consoler of the sick, the counsellor of her family, having ruined her health to look after her beloved sister-in-law, and to preserve the inheritance, was just on the point, by her exemplary devotion, of putting the patient in her coffin, and the inheritance in the hands of her nephew.

Apothecary Clump arrives; he trembles for his dear client; she is worth to him two hundred a year; he is resolved to save this precious life, in spite of Mrs. Bute. Mrs. Bute interrupts him, and says: "I am sure, my dear Mr. Clump, no efforts of mine have been wanting to restore our dear invalid, whom the ingratitude of her

nephew has laid on the bed of sickness. I never shrink from personal discomfort; I never refuse to sacrifice myself. . . . I would lay down my life for my duty, or for any member of my husband's family."<sup>1</sup> The disinterested apothecary returns to the charge heroically. Immediately she replies in the finest strain; her eloquence flows from her lips as from an over-full pitcher. She cries aloud: "Never, as long as nature supports me, will I desert the post of duty. As the mother of a family and the wife of an English clergyman, I humbly trust that my principles are good. When my poor James was in the small-pox, did I allow any hireling to nurse him? No!" The patient Clump scatters about sugared compliments, and pressing his point amidst interruptions, protestations, offers of sacrifice, railings against the nephew, at last hits the mark. He delicately insinuates that the patient "should have change, fresh air, gaiety." "The sight of her horrible nephew casually in the Park, where I am told the wretch drives with the brazen partner of his crimes," Mrs. Bute said (letting the cat of selfishness out of the bag of secrecy), "would cause her such a shock, that we should have to bring her back to bed again. She must not go out, Mr. Clump. She shall not go out as long as I remain to watch over her. And as for *my* health, what matters it? I give it cheerfully, sir. I sacrifice it at the altar of my duty." It is clear that the author attacks Mrs. Bute and all legacy-hunters. He gives her ridiculous airs, pompous phrases, a transparent, coarse, and blustering hypocrisy. The reader feels hatred and disgust for her the more she speaks. He would unmask her; he is pleased to see her assailed,

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. xix.



driven into a corner, taken in by the polished manoeuvres of her adversary, and rejoices with the author, who tears from her and emphasises the shameful confession of her tricks and her greed.

Having arrived so far, satirical reflection quits the literary form. In order the better to develop itself, it exhibits itself alone. Thackeray now attacks vice himself, and in his own name. No author is more fertile in dissertations; he constantly enters his story to reprimand or instruct us; he adds theoretical to active morality. We might glean from his novels one or two volumes of essays in the manner of La Bruyère or of Addison. There are essays on love, on vanity, on hypocrisy on meanness, on all the virtues, all the vices; and turning over a few pages, we shall find one on the comedies of legacies, and on too attentive relatives:

“What a dignity it gives an old lady, that balance at the banker’s! How tenderly we look at her faults, if she is a relative (and may every reader have a score of such), what a kind, good-natured old creature we find her! How the junior partner of Hobbs and Dobbs leads her smiling to the carriage with the lozenge upon it, and the fat wheezy coachman! How, when she comes to pay us a visit, we generally find an opportunity to let our friends know her station in the world! We say (and with perfect truth) I wish I had Miss MacWhirter’s signature to a cheque for five thousand pounds. She wouldn’t miss it, says your wife. She is my aunt, say you, in an easy careless way, when your friend asks if Miss MacWhirter is any relative! Your wife is perpetually sending her little testimonies of affection; your little girls work endless worsted baskets, cushions, and foot-stools for her. What a good fire there is in her room when she comes to pay you a visit, although your wife laces her stays without one! The house during her stay assumes a festive, neat, warm, jovial, snug appearance not visible at other

seasons. You yourself, dear sir, forget to go to sleep after dinner, and find yourself all of a sudden (though you invariably lose) very fond of a rubber. What good dinners you have—game every day, Malmsey-Madeira, and no end of fish from London! Even the servants in the kitchen share in the general prosperity; and, somehow, during the stay of Miss MacWhirter's fat coachman, the beer is grown much stronger, and the consumption of tea and sugar in the nursery (where her maid takes her meals) is not regarded in the least. Is it so, or is it not so? I appeal to the middle classes. Ah, gracious powers! I wish you would send me an old aunt—a maiden aunt—an aunt with a lozenge on her carriage, and a front of light coffee-coloured hair—how my children should work workbags for her, and my Julia and I would make her comfortable! Sweet—sweet vision! Foolish—foolish dream!"<sup>1</sup>

There is no disguising it. The reader most resolved not to be warned, is warned. When we have an aunt with a good sum to leave, we shall value our attentions and our tenderness at their true worth. The author has taken the place of our conscience, and the novel transformed by reflection, becomes a school of manners.

### III.

The lash is laid on very heavily in this school; it is the English taste. About tastes and whips there is no disputing; but without disputing we may understand, and the surest means of understanding the English taste is to compare it with the French taste.

I see in France, in a drawing-room of men of wit, or in an artist's studio, a score of lively people: they must be amused, that is their character. You may speak to them of human wickedness, but on condition of di-

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. ix.

verting them. If you get angry, they will be shocked ; if you teach a lesson, they will yawn. Laugh, it is the rule here—not cruelly, or from manifest enmity, but in good humour and in lightness of spirit. This nimble wit must act ; the discovery of a clean piece of folly is a fortunate hap for it. As a light flame, it glides and flickers in sudden outbreaks on the mere surface of things. Satisfy it by imitating it, and to please gay people be gay. Be polite, that is the second commandment, very like the other. You speak to sociable delicate, vain men, whom you must take care not to offend, but whom you must flatter. You would wound them by trying to carry conviction by force, by dint of solid arguments, by a display of eloquence and indignation. Do them the honour of supposing that they understand you at the first word, that a hinted smile is to them as good as a sound syllogism, that a fine allusion caught on the wing reaches them better than the heavy onset of a dull geometrical satire. Think, lastly (between ourselves), that, in politics as in religion, they have been for a thousand years very well governed, over governed ; that when a man is bored he desires to be so no more ; that a coat too tight splits at the elbows and elsewhere. They are critics from choice ; from choice they like to insinuate forbidden things ; and often, by abuse of logic, by transport, by vivacity, from ill humour, they strike at society through government, at morality through religion. They are scholars who have been too long under the rod ; they break the windows in opening the doors. I dare not tell you to please them : I simply remark that, in order to please them, a grain of seditious humour will do no harm.

I cross seven leagues of sea, and here I am in a great unadorned hall, with a multitude of benches, with gas burners, swept, orderly, a debating club or a preaching house. There are five hundred long faces, gloomy and subdued;<sup>1</sup> and at the first glance it is clear that they are not there to amuse themselves. In this land a grosser mood, overcharged with a heavier and stronger nourishment, has deprived impressions of their swift nobility, and thought, less facile and prompt, has lost its vivacity and its gaiety. If we rail before them, we must think that we are speaking to attentive, concentrated men, capable of durable and profound sensations, incapable of changeable and sudden emotion. Those immobile and contracted faces will preserve the same attitude; they resist fleeting and half-formed smiles; they cannot unbend; and their laughter is a convulsion as stiff as their gravity. Let us not skim over our subject, but lay stress upon it; let us not pass over it lightly, but impress it; let us not dally, but strike; be assured that we must vehemently move vehement passions, and that shocks are needed to set these nerves in motion. Let us also not forget that our hearers are practical minds, lovers of the useful; that they come here to be taught; that we owe them solid truths; that their common sense, somewhat contracted, does not fall in with hazardous extemporisations or doubtful hints; that they demand worked out refutations and complete explanations; and that if they have paid to come in, it was to hear advice which they might apply, and satire founded on proof. Their mood requires strong emotions; their mind asks for precise demonstrations. To satisfy

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray, in his *Book of Snobs*, says: "Their usual English expression of intense gloom and subdued agony."

their mood, we must not merely scratch, but torture vice; to satisfy their mind, we must not rail in sallies, but by arguments. One word more: down there, in the midst of the assembly, behold that gilded, splendid book, resting royally on a velvet cushion. It is the Bible; around it there are fifty moralists, who a while ago met at the theatre and pelted an actor off the stage with apples, who was guilty of having the wife of a citizen for his mistress. If with our finger-tip, with all the compliments and disguises in the world, we touch a single sacred leaf, or the smallest moral conventionalism, immediately fifty hands will fasten themselves on our coat collar and put us out at the door. With Englishmen we must be English, with their passion and their common sense adopt their leading-strings. Thus confined to recognise truths, satire will become more bitter, and will add the weight of public belief to the pressure of logic and the force of indignation.

#### IV.

No writer was better gifted than Thackeray for this kind of satire, because no faculty is more proper to satire than reflection. Reflection is concentrated attention, and concentrated attention increases a hundredfold the force and duration of emotions. He who is immersed in the contemplation of a vice, feels a hatred of vice, and the intensity of his hatred is measured by the intensity of his contemplation. At first anger is a generous wine, which intoxicates and excites; when preserved and shut up, it becomes a liquor burning all that it touches, and corroding even the vessel which contains it. Of all satirists, Thackeray, after

Swift, is the most gloomy. Even his countrymen have reproached him with depicting the world uglier than it is.<sup>1</sup> Indignation, grief, scorn, disgust, are his ordinary sentiments. When he digresses, and imagines tender souls, he exaggerates their sensibility, in order to render their oppression more odious. The selfishness which wounds them appears horrible, and their resigned sweetness is a mortal insult to their tyrants: it is the same hatred which has calculated the kindliness of the victims and the harshness of the persecutors.<sup>2</sup>

This anger, exasperated by reflection, is also armed by reflection. It is clear that the author is not carried away by passing indignation or pity. He has mastered himself before speaking. He has often weighed the rascality which he is about to describe. He is in possession of the motives, species, results, as a naturalist is of his classifications. He is sure of his judgment, and has matured it. He punishes like a man convinced, who has before him a heap of proofs, who advances nothing without a document or an argument, who has foreseen all objections and refuted all excuses, who will never pardon, who is right in being inflexible, who is conscious of his justice, and who rests his sentence and his vengeance on all the powers of meditation and equity. The effect of this justified and contained hatred is overwhelming. When we have read to the end of Balzac's novels, we feel the pleasure of a naturalist walking through a museum, past a fine collection of specimens and monstrosities. When we have read to the end of Thackeray, we feel the shudder of a stranger brought

<sup>1</sup> *The Edinburgh Review*.

<sup>2</sup> See the character of Amelia in *Vanity Fair*, and of Colonel Newcome in the *Newcomes*.

before a mattress in the operating-room of an hospital, on the day when cautery is applied or a limb is taken off.

In such a case the most natural weapon is serious irony, because it bears witness to concentrated hatred: he who employs it suppresses his first feeling; he feigns to be speaking against himself, and constrains himself to take the part of his adversary. On the other hand, this painful and voluntary attitude is the sign of excessive scorn; the protection which apparently is afforded to an enemy is the worst of insults. The author seems to say: "I am ashamed to attack you; you are so weak that, even supported, you must fall; your reasonings are your shame, and your excuses are your condemnation." Thus the more serious the irony, the stronger it is; the more you take care to defend your adversary, the more you degrade him; the more you seem to aid him, the more you crush him. This is why Swift's grave sarcasm is so terrible; we think he is showing respect, and he slays; his approbation is a flagellation. Amongst Swift's pupils, Thackeray is the first. Several chapters in the *Book of Snobs*—that, for instance, on literary snobs—are worthy of *Gulliver*. The author has been passing in review all the snobs of England; what will he say of his colleagues, the literary snobs? Will he dare to speak of them? Certainly:

"My dear and excellent querist, whom does the Schoolmaster flog so resolutely as his own son? Didn't Brutus chop his offspring's head off? You have a very bad opinion indeed of the present state of Literature and of literary men, if you fancy that any one of us would hesitate to stick a knife into his neighbour's back, if the latter's death could do the State any service.

"But the fact is, that in the literary profession there are no

Snobs. Look round at the whole body of British men of letters, and I defy you to point out among them a single instance of vulgarity, or envy, or assumption.

“Men and women, as far as I have known them, they are all modest in their demeanour, elegant in their manners, spotless in their lives, and honourable in their conduct to the world and to each other. You *may* occasionally, it is true, hear one literary man abusing his brother ; but why ? Not in the least out of malice ; not at all from envy ; merely from a sense of truth and public duty. Suppose, for instance, I good-naturedly point out a blemish in my friend *Mr. Punch's* person, and say *Mr. P.* has a hump-back, and his nose and chin are more crooked than those features in the Apollo or Antinous, which we are accustomed to consider as our standards of beauty ; does this argue malice on my part towards *Mr. Punch* ? Not in the least. It is the critic's duty to point out defects as well as merits, and he invariably does his duty with the utmost gentleness and candour. . . .

“That sense of equality and fraternity amongst Authors has always struck me as one of the most amiable characteristics of the class. It is because we know and respect each other, that the world respects us so much ; that we hold such a good position in society, and demean ourselves so irreproachably when there.

“Literary persons are held in such esteem by the nation, that about two of them have been absolutely invited to Court during the present reign ; and it is probable that towards the end of the season, one or two will be asked to dinner by Sir Robert Peel.

“They are such favourites with the public, that they are continually obliged to have their pictures taken and published ; and one or two could be pointed out, of whom the nation insists upon having a fresh portrait every year. Nothing can be more gratifying than this proof of the affectionate regard which the people has for its instructors.

“Literature is held in such honour in England, that there is



a sum of near twelve hundred pounds per annum set apart to pension deserving persons following that profession. And a great compliment this is, too, to the professors, and a proof of their generally prosperous and flourishing condition. They are generally so rich and thrifty, that scarcely any money is wanted to help them."<sup>1</sup>

We are tempted to make a mistake; and to comprehend this passage, we must remember that, in an aristocratical and monarchical society, amidst money-worship and adoration of rank, poor and low-born talent is treated as its low-birth and poverty deserve?<sup>2</sup> What makes these ironies yet stronger, is their length; some are prolonged during a whole tale, like the *Fatal Boots*. A Frenchman could not keep up a sarcasm so long. It would escape right or left through various emotions; it would change countenance, and not preserve so fixed an attitude—the mark of such a decided animosity, so calculated and bitter. There are characters which Thackeray develops through three volumes—Blanche Amory, Rebecca Sharp—and of whom he never speaks but with insult; both are base, and he never introduces them without plying them with tendernesses: dear Rebecca! tender Blanche! The tender Blanche is a sentimental and literary young creature, obliged to live with her parents, who do not understand her. She suffers so much, that she ridicules them aloud before everybody; she is so oppressed by the folly of her mother and father-in-law, that she never omits an opportunity of making them feel their folly. In good conscience, could she do otherwise?

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Snobs*, ch. xvi. ; on *Literary Snobs*.

<sup>2</sup> Stendhal says: L'esprit et le génie perdant vingt-cinq pour cent de leur valeur en abordant en Angleterre."

Would it not be on her part a lack of sincerity to affect a gaiety which she has not, or a respect which she cannot feel? We understand that the poor child is in need of sympathy. When she gave up her dolls, this loving heart became first enamoured of Trenmor, a high-souled convict, the fiery Sténio, Prince Djalma, and other heroes of French novels. Alas! the imaginary world is not sufficient for wounded souls, and to satisfy the craving for the ideal, for satiety, the heart at last gives itself up to beings of this world. At eleven years of age Miss Blanche felt tender emotions towards a young Savoyard, an organ-grinder at Paris, whom she persisted in believing to be a prince carried off from his parents; at twelve an old and hideous drawing master had agitated her young heart; at Madame de Carmel's boarding-school a correspondence by letter took place with two young gentlemen of the College Charlemagne. Dear forlorn girl, her delicate feet are already wounded by the briars in her path of life; every day her illusions shed their leaves; in vain she puts them down in verse, in a little book bound in blue velvet, with a clasp of gold, entitled *Mes Larmes*. In this isolation, what is she to do? She grows enthusiastic over the young ladies whom she meets, feels a magnetic attraction at sight of them, becomes their sister, except that she casts them aside to-morrow like an old dress: we cannot command our feelings, and nothing is more beautiful than the natural. Moreover, as the amiable child has much taste, a lively imagination, a poetic inclination for change, she keeps her maid Pincott at work day and night. Like a delicate person, a genuine dilettante

and lover of the beautiful, she scolds her for her heavy eyes and her pale face :

“ Our muse, with the candour which distinguished her, never failed to remind her attendant of the real state of matters. ‘ I should send you away, Pincott, for you are a great deal too weak, and your eyes are failing you, and you are always crying and snivelling, and wanting the doctor ; but I wish that your parents at home should be supported, and I go on enduring for their sake, mind,’ the dear Blanche would say to her timid little attendant. Or, ‘ Pincott, your wretched appearance and slavish manner, and red eyes, positively give me the migraine ; and I think I shall make you wear rouge, so that you may look a little cheerful ;’ or, ‘ Pincott, I can’t bear, even for the sake of your starving parents, that you should tear my hair out of my head in that manner ; and I will thank you to write to them and say that I dispense with your services.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

This fool of a Pincott does not appreciate her good fortune. Can one be sad in serving such a superior being as Miss Blanche? How delightful to furnish her with subjects for her style ! for, to confess the truth, Miss Blanche has not disdained to write “ some very pretty verses about the lonely little tiring-maid, whose heart was far away,” “ sad exile in a foreign land.” Alas ! the slightest event suffices to wound this too sensitive heart. At the least emotion her tears flow, her feelings are shaken, like a delicate butterfly, crushed as soon as touched. There she goes, aerial, her eyes fixed on heaven, a faint smile lingering round her rosy lips, a touching sylphide, so consoling to all who surround her, that every one wishes her at the bottom of a well.

One step added to serious irony leads us to serious

<sup>1</sup> These remarks are only to be found in the octavo edition of *Pendennis*.—T.R.

caricature. Here, as before, the author pleads the rights of his neighbour ; the only difference is, that he pleads them with too much warmth ; it is insult upon insult. Under this head it abounds in Thackeray. Some of his grotesques are outrageous : for instance, M. Alcide de Mirobolant, a French cook, an artist in sauces, who declares his passion to Miss Blanche through the medium of symbolic dishes, and thinks himself a gentleman ; Mrs. Major O'Dowd, a sort of female grenadier, the most pompous and talkative of Irishwomen, bent on ruling the regiment, and marrying the bachelors will they nill they ; Miss Briggs, an old companion born to receive insults, to make phrases and to shed tears ; the Doctor, who proves to his scholars who write bad Greek, that habitual idleness and bad construing lead to the gallows. These calculated deformities only excite a sad smile. We always perceive behind the oddity of the character the sardonic air of the painter, and we conclude that the human race is base and stupid. Other figures less exaggerated, are not more natural. We see that the author throws them expressly into palpable follies and marked contradictions. Such is Miss Crawley, an old maid, without any morals, and a free-thinker, who praises unequal marriages, and falls into a fit when on the next page her nephew makes one ; who calls Rebecca Sharp her equal, and at the same time bids her "put some coals on the fire ;" who, on learning the departure of her favourite, cries with despair, "Gracious goodness, and who's to make my chocolate ?" These are comedy scenes, and not pictures of manners. There are twenty such. You see an excellent aunt, Mrs. Hoggarty, of Castle Hoggarty, settling down in the house of her nephew Titmarsh, throw him into vast

expenses, persecute his wife, drive away his friends, make his marriage unhappy. The poor ruined fellow is thrown into prison. She denounces him to the creditors with genuine indignation, and reproaches him with perfect sincerity. The wretch has been his aunt's executioner; she has been dragged by him from her home, tyrannised over by him, robbed by him, outraged by his wife. She writes:

"Such waist and extravygance never, never, never did I see. Butter waisted as if it had been dirt, coles flung away, candles burned *at both ends*; . . . and now you have the audassaty, being placed in prison justly for your crimes, for cheating me of £3000. . . . You come upon me to pay your detts! No, sir, it is quite enough that your mother should go on the parish, and that your wife should sweep the streets, to which you have indeed brought them; I, at least . . . have some of the comforts to which my rank entitles me. The furnitur in this house is mine; and as I presume you intend *your lady* to sleep in the streets, I give you warning that I shall remove it all to-morrow. Mr. Smithers will tell you that I had intended to leave you my intire fortune. I have this morning, in his presents, solamly toar up my will, and hereby renounce all connection with you and your beggarly family. P.S.—I took a viper into my bosom, *and it stung me.*"<sup>1</sup>

This just and compassionate woman finds her match, a pious man, John Brough, Esquire, M.P., director of the Independent West Diddlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company. This virtuous Christian has sniffed from afar the cheering odour of her lands, houses, stocks, and other landed and personal property. He pounces upon the fine property of Mrs. Hoggarty, is sorry to see that

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, ch. xi.

it only brings that lady four per cent, and resolves to double her income. He calls upon her at her lodgings when her face was shockingly swelled and bitten by—never mind what:

“ ‘Gracious heavens!’ shouted John Brough, Esquire, ‘a lady of your rank to suffer in this way!—the excellent relative of my dear boy, Titmarsh! Never, madam—never let it be said that Mrs. Hoggarty of Castle Hoggarty should be subject to such horrible humiliation, while John Brough has a home to offer her—a humble, happy Christian home, madam, though unlike, perhaps, the splendour to which you have been accustomed in the course of your distinguished career. Isabella, my love!—Belinda! speak to Mrs. Hoggarty. Tell her that John Brough’s house is hers from garret to cellar. I repeat it, madam, from garret to cellar. I desire—I insist—I order, that Mrs. Hoggarty of Castle Hoggarty’s trunks should be placed this instant in my carriage!’ ”<sup>1</sup>

This style raises a laugh, if you will, but a sad laugh. We have just learned that man is a hypocrite, unjust, tyrannical, blind. In our vexation we turn to the author, and we see on his lips only sarcasms, on his brow only chagrin.

#### V.

Let us look carefully; perhaps in less grave matters we shall find subject of genuine laughter. Let us consider, not a rascality, but a misadventure; rascality revolts, a misadventure might amuse. But amusement alone is not here; even in a diversion the satire retains its force, because reflection retains its intensity. There is in English fun a seriousness, an effort, an application that is marvellous, and their comicalities are composed

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, ch. ix.

with as much knowledge as their sermons. The powerful attention decomposes its object in all its parts, and reproduces it with illusive detail and relief. Swift describes the land of speaking horses, the politics of Lilliput, the inventors of the Flying Island, with details as precise and harmonious as an experienced traveller, an exact inquirer into manners and countries. Thus supported, the impossible monster and the literary grotesque enter upon actual existence, and the phantoms of imagination take the consistency of objects which we touch. Thackeray introduces this imperturbable gravity, this solid conception, this talent for illusion, into his farce. Let us study one of his moral essays; he wishes to prove that in the world we must conform to received customs, and he transforms this commonplace into an Oriental anecdote. Let us count up the details of manners, geography, chronology, cookery, the mathematical designation of every object, person, and gesture, the lucidity of imagination, the profusion of local truths; we will then understand why his raillery produces so original and biting an impression, and we will find here the same degree of study and the same attentive energy as in the foregoing ironies and exaggerations: his humour is as reflective as his hatred; he has changed his attitude, not his faculty:

"I am naturally averse to egotism, and hate self-laudation consumedly; but I can't help relating here a circumstance illustrative of the point in question, in which I must think I acted with considerable prudence.

"Being at Constantinople a few years since—(on a delicate mission)—the Russians were playing a double game, between ourselves, and it became necessary on our part to employ an *extra negotiator*—Leckerbiss Pasha of Roumelia, then Chief

Galeongee of the Porte, gave a diplomatic banquet at his summer palace at Bujukdere. I was on the left of the Galeongee; and the Russian agent Count de Diddloff on his dexter side. Diddloff is a dandy who would die of a rose in aromatic pain: he had tried to have me assassinated three times in the course of the negotiation: but of course we were friends in public, and saluted each other in the most cordial and charming manner.

"The Galeongee is—or was, alas! for a bow-string has done for him—a staunch supporter of the old school of Turkish politics. We dined with our fingers, and had flaps of bread for plates; the only innovation he admitted was the use of European liquors, in which he indulged with great gusto. He was an enormous eater. Amongst the dishes a very large one was placed before him of a lamb dressed in its wool, stuffed with prunes, garlic, assafetida, capsicums, and other condiments, the most abominable mixture that ever mortal smelt or tasted. The Galeongee ate of this hugely; and, pursuing the Eastern fashion, insisted on helping his friends right and left, and when he came to a particularly spicy morsel, would push it with his own hands into his guests' very mouths.

"I never shall forget the look of poor Diddloff, when his Excellency, rolling up a large quantity of this into a ball, and exclaiming, "Buk Buk" (it is very good), administered the horrible bolus to Diddloff. The Russian's eyes rolled dreadfully as he received it: he swallowed it with a grimace that I thought must precede a convulsion, and seizing a bottle next him, which he thought was Sauterne, but which turned out to be French brandy, he drank off nearly a pint before he knew his error. It finished him; he was carried away from the dining-room almost dead, and laid out to cool in a summer-house on the Bosphorus.

"When it came to my turn, I took down the condiment with a smile, said "Bismillah," licked my lips with easy gratification, and when the next dish was served, made up a ball myself so dexterously, and popped it down the old Galeongee's mouth with so much grace, that his heart was won. Russia was put out of



Court at once, and the treaty of Kabobanople was signed. As for Diddloff, all was over with him, he was recalled to St. Petersburg, and Sir Roderick Murchison saw him, under the No. 3967, working in the Ural mines.<sup>1</sup>

The anecdote is evidently authentic; and when De Foe related the apparition of Mrs. Veal, he did not better imitate the style of an authenticated account.

## VI.

Such attentive reflection is a source of sadness. To amuse ourselves with human passions, we must consider them as inquisitive men, like shifting puppets, or as learned men, like regulated wheels, or as artists, like powerful springs. If we only consider them as virtuous or vicious, our lost illusions will enchain us in gloomy thoughts, and we will find in man only weakness and ugliness. This is why Thackeray depreciates our whole nature. He does as a novelist what Hobbes does as a philosopher. Almost everywhere, when he describes fine sentiments, he derives them from an ugly source. Tenderness, kindness, love, are in his characters the effect of the nerves, of instinct, or of a moral disease. Amelia Sedley, his favourite, and one of his masterpieces, is a poor little woman, snivelling, incapable of reflection and decision, blind, a superstitious adorer of a coarse and selfish husband, always sacrificed by her own will and fault, whose love is made up of folly and weakness, often unjust, accustomed to see falsely, and more worthy of compassion than respect. Lady Castlewood, so good and tender, is enamoured, like Amelia, of a drunken and imbecile

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Snobs*, ch. i.; *The Snob playfully dealt with*.

boor ; and her wild jealousy, exasperated on the slightest suspicion, implacable against her husband, giving utterance violently to cruel words, shows that her love springs not from virtue but from mood. Helen Pendennis, a model mother, is a somewhat silly country prude, of narrow education, jealous also, and having in her jealousy all the harshness of Puritanism and passion. She faints on learning that her son has a mistress : it is "such a sin, such a dreadful sin. I can't bear to think that my boy should commit such a crime. I wish he had died, almost, before he had done it."<sup>1</sup> Whenever she is spoken to of little Fanny, "the widow's countenance, always soft and gentle, assumed a cruel and inexorable expression."<sup>2</sup> Meeting Fanny at the bedside of the sick young man, she drives her away, as if she were a prostitute and a servant. Maternal love, in her as in the others, is an incurable blindness : her son is her idol ; in her adoration she finds the means of making his lot unbearable, and himself unhappy. As to the love of the men for the women, if we judge from the pictures of the author, we can but feel pity for it, and look on it as ridiculous. At a certain age, according to Thackeray, nature speaks : we meet Somebody ; a fool or not, good or bad, we adore her ; it is a fever. At the age of six months dogs have their disease ; man has his at twenty. If a man loves, it is not because the lady is loveable, but because it is his nature so to do. "Do you suppose you would drink if you were not thirsty, or eat if you were not hungry ?"<sup>3</sup>

He relates the history of this hunger and thirst with a bitter vigour. He seems like an intoxicated man grown sober, railing at drunkenness. He explains at

<sup>1</sup> *Pendennis*, ch. liv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ch. lii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ch. liii.

length, in a half sarcastic tone the follies which Major Dobbin commits for the sake of Amelia; how the Major buys bad wines from her father; how he tells the postillions to make haste, how he rouses the servants, persecutes his friends, to see Amelia more quickly; how, after ten years of sacrifice, tenderness, and service, he sees that he is held second to an old portrait of a faithless, coarse, selfish, and dead husband. The saddest of these accounts is that of the first love of Pendennis—Miss Fotheringay, the actress, whom he loves, a matter-of-fact person, a good housekeeper, who has the mind and education of a kitchen-maid. She speaks to the young man of the fine weather, and the pie she has just been making: Pendennis discovers in these two phrases a wonderful depth of intellect and a superhuman majesty of devotion. He asks Miss Fotheringay, who has just been playing Ophelia, if the latter loved Hamlet. Miss Fotheringay answers:

“‘In love with such a little ojou wretch as that stunted manager of a Bingley!’ She bristled with indignation at the thought. Pen explained it was not of her he spoke, but of Ophelia of the play. ‘Oh, indeed; if no offence was meant, none was taken: but as for Bingley, indeed, she did not value him—not that glass of punch.’ Pen next tried her on Kotzebue. ‘Kotzebue? who was he?’ ‘The author of the play in which she had been performing so admirably.’ ‘She did not know that—the man’s name at the beginning of the book was Thompson,’ she said. Pen laughed at her adorable simplicity.”

“‘How beautiful she is,’ thought Pen, cantering homewards. ‘Pendennis, Pendennis—how she spoke the word! Emily, Emily! how good, how noble, how beautiful, how perfect she is!’”<sup>1</sup>

The first volume runs wholly upon this contrast; it

<sup>1</sup> *Pendennis*, ch. v.

seems as though Thackeray says to his reader: "My dear brothers in humanity, we are rascals forty-nine days in fifty; in the fiftieth, if we escape pride, vanity, wickedness, selfishness, it is because we fall into a hot fever; our folly causes our devotion."

## VII.

Yet, short of being Swift, a man must love something; he cannot always be wounding and destroying; and the heart, wearied of scorn and hate, needs repose in praise and tenderness. Moreover, to blame a fault is to laud the contrary quality; and a man cannot sacrifice a victim without raising an altar: it is circumstance which fixes on the one, and which builds up the other; and the moralist who combats the dominant vice of his country and his age, preaches the virtue contrary to the vice of his age and his country. In an aristocratical and commercial society, this vice is selfishness and pride! Thackeray therefore extols sweetness and tenderness. Let love and kindness be blind, instinctive, unreasoning, ridiculous, it matters little: such as they are, he adores them; and there is no more singular contrast than that of his heroes and of his admiration. He creates foolish women, and kneels before them; the artist within him contradicts the commentator: the first is ironical, the second laudatory; the first represents the pettiness of love, the second writes its panegyric; the top of the page is a satire in action, the bottom is a dithyramb in periods. The compliments which he lavishes on Amelia Sedley, Helen Pendennis, Laura, are infinite; no author ever more visibly and incessantly paid court to his female

creations; he sacrifices his male creations to them, not once, but a hundred times:

"Very likely female pelicans like so to bleed under the selfish little beaks of their young ones: it is certain that women do. There must be some sort of pleasure which we men don't understand, which accompanies the pain of being sacrificed.<sup>1</sup> . . . Do not let us men despise these instincts because we cannot feel them. These women were made for our comfort and delectation, gentlemen,—with all the rest of the minor animals.<sup>2</sup> . . . Be it for a reckless husband, a dissipated son, a darling scapegrace of a brother, how ready their hearts are to pour out their best treasures for the benefit of the cherished person; and what a deal of this sort of enjoyment are we, on our side, ready to give the soft creatures! There is scarce a man that reads this, but has administered pleasure in that fashion to his woman-kind, and has treated them to the luxury of forgiving him."<sup>3</sup>

When he enters the room of a good mother, or of a young honest girl, he casts down his eyes as on the threshold of a sanctuary. In the presence of Laura resigned, pious, he checks himself:

"And as that duty was performed quite noiselessly—while the supplications which endowed her with the requisite strength for fulfilling it, also took place in her own chamber, away from all mortal sight,—we, too, must be perforce silent about these virtues of hers, which no more bear public talking about than a flower will bear to bloom in a ball-room."<sup>4</sup>

Like Dickens, he has a reverence for the family, for tender and simple sentiments, calm and pure contentments, such as are relished by the fireside between a

<sup>1</sup> *Pendennis*, ch. xxi. This passage is only found in the octavo edition.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ch. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ch. xxi. These words are only found in the octavo edition.—Tr.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ch. li.

child and a wife. When this misanthrope, so reflective and harsh, lights upon a filial effusion or a maternal grief, he is wounded in a sensitive place, and, like Dickens, he makes us weep.<sup>1</sup>

We have enemies because we have friends, and aversions because we have preferences. If we prefer devoted kindness and tender affections, we dislike arrogance and harshness; the cause of love is also the cause of hate; and sarcasm, like sympathy, is the criticism of a social form and a public vice. This is why Thackeray's novels are a war against aristocracy. Like Rousseau, he praised simple and affectionate manners; like Rousseau, he hated the distinction of ranks.

He wrote a whole book on this, a sort of moral and half political pamphlet, the *Book of Snobs*. The word does not exist in France, because they have not the thing. The snob is a child of aristocratical societies; perched on his step of the long ladder, he respects the man on the step above him, and despises the man on the step below, without inquiring what they are worth, solely on account of their position; in his innermost heart he finds it natural to kiss the boots of the first, and to kick the second. Thackeray reckons up at length the degrees of this habit. Hear his conclusion:

"I can bear it no longer—this diabolical invention of gentility, which kills natural kindness and honest friendship. Proper pride, indeed! Rank and precedence, forsooth! The table of ranks and degrees is a lie and should be flung into the fire. Organise rank and precedence! that was well for the masters of ceremonies of former ages. Come forward, some great marshal, and organise Equality in society."

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, in the *Great Hoggarty Diamond*, the death of the little child. The *Book of Snobs* ends thus: "Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love best of all."

Then he adds, with common sense, altogether English bitterness and familiarity :

“If ever our cousins the Smigamags asked me to meet Lord Longears, I would like to take an opportunity after dinner, and say, in the most good-natured way in the world :—Sir, Fortune makes you a present of a number of thousand pounds every year. The ineffable wisdom of our ancestors has placed you as a chief and hereditary legislator over me. Our admirable Constitution (the pride of Britons and envy of surrounding nations) obliges me to receive you as my senator, superior, and guardian. Your eldest son, Fitz-Heehaw, is sure of a place in Parliament ; your younger sons, the De Brays, will kindly condescend to be post-captains and lieutenant-colonels, and to represent us in foreign courts, or to take a good living when it falls convenient. These prizes our admirable Constitution (the pride and envy of, etc.) pronounces to be your due ; without count of your dulness, your vices, your selfishness ; of your entire incapacity and folly. Dull as you may be (and we have as good a right to assume that my lord is an ass, as the other proposition, that he is an enlightened patriot) ;—dull, I say, as you may be, no one will accuse you of such monstrous folly, as to suppose that you are indifferent to the good luck which you possess, or have any inclination to part with it. No—and patriots as we are, under happier circumstances, Smith and I, I have no doubt, were we dukes ourselves, would stand by our order.

“We would submit good-naturedly to sit in a high place. We would acquiesce in that admirable Constitution (pride and envy of, etc.) which made us chiefs and the world our inferiors ; we would not cavil particularly at that notion of hereditary superiority which brought so many simple people cringing to our knees. May be we would rally round the Corn-Laws ; we would make a stand against the Reform Bill ; we would die rather than repeal the acts against Catholics and Dissenters ; we would, by our noble system of class-legislation, bring Ireland to its present admirable condition.

"But Smith and I are not Earls as yet. We don't believe that it is for the interest of Smith's army, that young De Bray should be a Colonel at five-and-twenty, of Smith's diplomatic relations, that Lord Longears should go ambassador to Constantinople,—of our politics, that Longears should put his hereditary foot into them.

"This booing and cringing Smith believes to be the act of Snobs; and he will do all in his might and main to be a Snob, and to submit to Snobs no longer. To Longears he says, 'We can't help seeing, Longears, that we are as good as you. We can spall even better; we can think quite as rightly; we will not have you for our master, or black your shoes any more.'"<sup>1</sup>

Thackeray's opinion on politics only continues his remarks as a moralist. If he hates aristocracy, it is less because it oppresses man than because it corrupts him; in deforming social life, it deforms private life; in establishing injustice, it establishes vice; after having made itself master of the government, it poisons the soul; and Thackeray finds its trace in the perversity and foolishness of all classes and all sentiments.

The king opens this list of vengeful portraits. It is George IV., "the first gentleman in Europe." This great monarch, so justly regretted, could cut out a coat, drive a four-in-hand nearly as well as the Brighton coachman, and play the fiddle well. "In the vigour of youth and the prime force of his invention, he invented Maraschino punch, a shoe-buckle, and a Chinese pavilion, the most hideous building in the world:"

"Two boys had leave from their loyal masters to go from Slaughter House School where they were educated, and to appear on Drury Lane stage, amongst a crowd which assembled there to greet the king. THE KING? There he was. Beef-

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Snobs*, last chapter.



others were before the august sex : the Marquis of Steyne (Lord of the Privy Council and other great offices of state were behind the chair in which he sat. He sat—fair of face, partly of person, crowned with wisdom, and in a rich, curling head of hair—How we may God bless him ! How the house rocked and shouted with that magnificent music. How they cheered, and cried, and waved handkerchiefs. Ladies wept : mothers clasped their children : some fainted with emotion. . . . Yes, we saw him. Fate cannot deprive us of that. Others have seen Napoleon. Some few still exist who have beheld Frederick the Great, Doctor Johnson, Marie Antoinette, etc.—be it our reasonable boast to our children, that we saw George the Good, the Magnificent, the Great.”<sup>1</sup>

Dear prince : the virtues emanating from his heroic throne spread through the hearts of all his courtiers. Whoever presented a better example than the Marquis of Steyne ! This lord, a king in his own house, tried to prove that he was so. He forces his wife to sit at table beside women without any character, his mistresses. Like a true prince, he had for his special enemy his eldest son, presumptive heir to the marquisate, whom he leaves to starve, and compels to run into debt. He is now making love to a charming person, Mrs. Rebecca Crawley, whom he loves for her hypocrisy, coolness, and unequalled insensibility. The Marquis, by dint of debasing and oppressing all who surround him, ends by hating and despising men ; he has no taste for anything but perfect rascalities. Rebecca rouses him ; one day even she transports him with enthusiasm. She plays Clytemnestra in a charade, and her husband Agamemnon ; she advances to the bed, a dagger in her hand ; her eyes are lighted up with a

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. xlviii. This passage is only found in the original octavo edition.—T.R.

smile so ghastly, that people quake as they look at her; Brava! brava! old Steyne's strident voice was heard roaring over all the rest, "By ——, she'd do it too!" We can hear that he has the true conjugal feeling. His conversation is remarkably frank. "I can't send Briggs away," Becky said.—"You owe her her wages, I suppose," said the peer.—"Worse than that, I have ruined her."—"Ruined her? then why don't you turn her out?"

He is, moreover, an accomplished gentleman, of fascinating sweetness; he treats his women like a pacha, and his words are like blows. Let us read again the domestic scene in which he gives the order to invite Mrs. Crawley. Lady Gaunt, his daughter-in-law, says that she will not be present at dinner, and will go home. His lordship answered:


"I wish you would, and stay there. You will find the bailiffs at Bareacres very pleasant company, and I shall be freed from lending money to your relations, and from your own damned tragedy airs. Who are you to give orders here? You have no money. You've got no brains. You were here to have children, and you have not had any. Gaunt's tired of you; and George's wife is the only person in the family who doesn't wish you were dead. Gaunt would marry again if you were. . . . You, forsooth, must give yourself airs of virtue. . . . Pray, madame, shall I tell you some little anecdotes about my Lady Bareacres, your mamma?"<sup>1</sup>

The rest is in the same style. His daughters-in-law, driven to despair, say they wish they were dead. This declaration rejoices him, and he concludes with these words: "This Temple of Virtue belongs to me. And if I invite all Newgate or all Bedlam here, by ——, they

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. xlix.

shall be welcome." The habit of despotism makes despots, and the best means of implanting despots in families, is to preserve nobles in the State.

Let us take rest in the contemplation of the country gentleman. The innocence of the fields, hereditary respect, family traditions, the pursuit of agriculture, the exercise of local magistracy, must have produced these upright and sensible men, full of kindness and probity, protectors of their county, and servants of their country. Sir Pitt Crawley is a model; he has four thousand a year and two parliamentary boroughs. It is true that these are rotten boroughs, and that he sells the second for fifteen hundred a year. He is an excellent steward and shears his farmers so close that he can only find bankrupt-tenants. A coach proprietor, a government contractor, a mine proprietor, he pays his subordinates so badly, and is so niggard in outlay, that his mines "are filled with water; and as for his coach-horses, every mail proprietor in the kingdom knew that he lost more horses than any man in the country;" the Government flung his contract of damaged beef upon his hands. A popular man, he always prefers the society of a horse-dealer to the company of a gentleman. "He was fond of drink, of swearing, of joking with the farmers' daughters; . . . would cut his joke and drink his glass with a tenant, and sell him up the next day; or have his laugh with the poacher he was transporting with equal good humour." He speaks with a country accent, has the mind of a lackey, the habits of a boor. At table, waited on by three men and a butler, on massive silver, he inquires into the dishes, and the beasts which have furnished them. "What *ship* was it, Horrocks, and when did you kill?" "One of the



black-faced Scotch, Sir Pitt: we killed on Thursday." "Who took any?" "Steel of Mudbury took the saddle and two legs, Sir Pitt; but he says the last was too young and confounded woolly, Sir Pitt." "What became of the shoulders?" The dialogue goes on in the same tone; after the Scotch mutton comes the Black Kentish pig: these animals might be Sir Pitt's family, so much is he interested in them. As for his daughters, he lets them stray to the gardener's cottage, where they pick up their education. As for his wife, he beats her from time to time. If he pays his people one farthing more than he owes them he asks it back. "A farthing a day is seven shillings a year: seven shillings a year is the interest of seven guineas. Take care of your farthings, old Tinker, and your guineas will come quite nat'ral." "He never gave away a farthing in his life," growled Tinker. "Never, and never will: it is against my principle." He is impudent, brutal, coarse, stingy, shrewd, extravagant; but is courted by ministers, is a high-sheriff, honoured, powerful, he rolls in a gilded carriage, and is one of the pillars of the State.

These are the rich; probably money has corrupted them. Let us look for a poor aristocrat, free from temptations; his lofty mind, left to itself, will display all its native beauty. Sir Francis Clavering is in this case. He has played, drunk, and supped until he has nothing more left. Transactions at the gambling-table speedily effected his ruin; he had been forced to sell out of his regiment; had shown the white feather, and after frequenting all the billiard-rooms in Europe, been thrown into prison by his uncourteous creditors. To get out he married a good-natured Indian widow, who outrages spelling, and whose money was left her by her father, a disre-

putable old lawyer and indigo-smuggler. Clavering ruins her, goes on his knees to obtain gold and pardon, swears on the Bible to contract no more debts, and when he goes out runs straight to the money-lender. Of all the rascals that novelists have ever exhibited, he is the basest. He has neither resolution nor common sense; he is simply a man in a state of dissolution. He swallows insults like water, weeps, begs pardon, and begins again. He debases himself, prostrates himself, and the next moment swears and storms, to fall back into the depths of the extremest cowardice. He implores, threatens, and in the same quarter of an hour accepts the threatened man as his intimate confidant and friend:

"Now, ain't it hard that she won't trust me with a single tea-spoon; ain't it ungentlemanlike, Altamont? You know my lady's of low birth—that is—I beg your pardon—hem—that is, it's most cruel of her not to show more confidence in me. And the very servants begin to laugh—the dam scoundrels! . . . They don't answer my bell; and—and my man was at Vauxhall last night with one of my dress shirts and my velvet waistcoat on, I know it was mine—the confounded impudent blackguard!—and he went on dancing before my eyes, confound him! I'm sure he'll live to be hanged—he deserves to be hanged—all those infernal rascals of valets!"<sup>1</sup>

His conversation is a compound of oaths, whines, and ravings; he is not a man, but the wreck of a man: there survive in him but the discordant remains of vile passions, like the fragments of a crushed snake, which, unable to bite, bruise themselves and wriggle about in their slaver and mud. The sight of a bank-note makes him launch blindly into a mass of entreaties and lies. The future has disappeared for him, he sees but the

<sup>1</sup> *Pendennis*, ch. lx.

present. He will sign a bill for twenty pounds at three months to get a sovereign. His degradation has become imbecility; his eyes are shut; he does not see that his protestations excite mistrust, that his lies excite disgust, that by his very baseness he loses the fruit of his baseness; so that when he comes in, a man feels a violent inclination to take the honourable baronet, the member of parliament, the proud inhabitant of a historic house, by the neck, and pitch him, like a basket of rubbish, from the top of the stairs to the bottom.

We must stop. A volume would not exhaust the list of perfections which Thackeray discovers in the English aristocracy. The Marquis of Farintosh, twenty-fifth of his name, an illustrious fool, healthy and full of self-conceit, whom all the women ogle and all the men bow to; Lady Kew an old woman of the world, tyrannical and corrupted, at enmity with her daughter, and a match-maker; Sir Barnes Newcome, one of the most cowardly of men, the wickedest, the falsest, the best abused and beaten who has ever smiled in a drawing-room or spoken in Parliament. I see only one estimable character, and he is not in the front rank—Lord Kew, who, after many follies and excesses, is touched by his Puritan old mother, and repents. But these portraits are sweet compared to the dissertations; the commentator is still more bitter than the artist; he wounds more in speaking than in making his personages speak. We must read his biting diatribes against marriages for the sake of money or rank, and against the sacrifice of girls; against the inequality of inheritance and the envy of younger sons; against the education of the nobles, and their traditionary insolence; against the purchase of commissions in the

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army, the isolation of classes, the outrages on nature and family, invented by society and law. Behind this philosophy is shown a second gallery of portraits as insulting as the first: for inequality, having corrupted the great men whom it exalts, corrupts the small men whom it degrades; and the spectacle of envy or baseness in the small, is as ugly as that of insolence or despotism in the great. According to Thackeray, English society is a compound of flatteries and intrigues, each striving to hoist himself up a step higher on the social ladder and to push back those who are climbing. To be received at court, to see one's name in the papers amongst a list of illustrious guests, to give a cup of tea at home to some stupid and bloated peer; such is the supreme limit of human ambition and felicity. For one master there are always a hundred lackeys. Major Pendennis, a resolute man, cool and clever, has contracted this leprosy. His happiness to-day is to bow to a lord. He is only at peace in a drawing-room, or in a park of the aristocracy. He craves to be treated with that humiliating condescension wherewith the great overwhelm their inferiors. He pockets lack of attention with ease, and dines graciously at a noble board, where he is invited twice in three years to stop a gap. He leaves a man of genius or a woman of wit, to converse with a titled fool or a tipsy lord. He prefers being tolerated at a Marquis' to being respected at a commoner's. Having exalted these fine dispositions into principles, he inculcates them on his nephew, whom he loves, and to push him on in the world, offers him in marriage a basely acquired fortune and the daughter of a convict. Others glide through the proud drawing-rooms, not with parasitic manners, but on account of

their splendid balance at the banker's. Once upon a time in France, the nobles manured their estates with the money of citizens; now in England the citizens ennoble their money by marrying a lady of noble birth. For a hundred thousand pounds to the father, Pump, the merchant, marries Lady Blanche Stiffneck, who, though married, remains my Lady. Naturally young Pump is scorned by her, as a tradesman, and moreover, hated for having made her half a woman of the people. He dare not see his own friends in his own house; they are too vulgar for his wife. He dare not visit the friends of his wife; they are too high for him. He is his wife's butler, the butt of his father-in-law, the servant of his son, and consoles himself by thinking that his grandsons, when they become Lord Pump, will blush for him and never mention his name.<sup>1</sup> A third means of entering the aristocracy is to ruin oneself, and never see any one. This ingenious method is employed by Mrs. Major Ponto in the country. She has an incomparable governess for her daughters, who thinks that Dante is called Alighieri because he was born at Algiers, but who has educated two marchionesses and a countess.

"Some one wondered we were not enlivened by the appearance of some of the neighbours.—We can't in our position of life, we can't well associate with the attorney's family, as I leave you to suppose—and the Doctor—one may ask one's medical man to one's table, certainly: but his family.—The people in that large red house just outside of the town.—What! the *château-calicot*. That purse-proud ex-linendraper—The parson—Oh! he used to preach in a surplice. He is a Puseyite!"

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Snobs*, ch. viii.; *Great City Snobs*.



This sensible Ponto family yawns in solitude for six months, and the rest of the year enjoys the gluttony of the country-squires whom they regale, and the rebuffs of the great lords whom they visit. The son, an officer of the hussars, requires to be kept in luxury so as to be on an equality with his noble comrades, and his tailor receives above three hundred a year out of the nine hundred which make up the whole family income.<sup>1</sup> I should never end, if I recounted all the villanies and miseries which Thackeray attributes to the aristocratic spirit, the division of families, the pride of the ennobled sister, the jealousy of the sister who has not been ennobled, the degradation of the characters trained up from school to reverence the little lords, the abasement of the daughters who strive to compass noble marriages, the rage of snubbed vanity, the meanness of the attentions offered, the triumph of folly, the scorn of talent, the consecrated injustice, the heart rendered unnatural, the morals perverted. Before this striking picture of truth and genius, we need remember that this injurious inequality is the cause of a wholesome liberty, that social injustice produces political welfare, that a class of hereditary nobles is a class of hereditary statesmen, that in a century and a half England has had a hundred and fifty years of good government, that in a century and a half France has had a hundred and fifty years of bad government, that all is compensated, and that it is possible to pay dearly for capable leaders, a consistent policy, free elections, and the control of the government by the nation. We must also remember that this talent, founded on intense reflection, concentrated in moral prejudices, could not but have

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Snobs*, ch. xxvi. ; *On Some Country Snobs*.

transformed the picture of manners into a systematic and combative satire, exasperate satire into calculated and implacable animosity, blacken human nature, and attack again and again with studied, redoubled, and natural hatred, the chief vice of his country and of his time.

§ 2.—THE ARTIST.

VIII.

In literature as well as in politics, we cannot have everything. Talents, like happiness, do not always follow suit. Whatever constitution it selects, a people is always half unhappy; whatever genius he has, a writer is always half impotent. We cannot preserve at once more than a single attitude. To transform the novel is to deform it: he who, like Thackeray, gives to the novel satire for its object, ceases to give it art for its rule, and the complete strength of the satirist is the weakness of the novelist.

What is a novelist? In my opinion he is a psychologist, who naturally and involuntarily sets psychology at work; he is nothing else, nor more. He loves to picture feelings, to perceive their connections, their precedents, their consequences; and he indulges in this pleasure. In his eyes they are forces, having various directions and magnitudes. About their justice or injustice he troubles himself little. He introduces them in characters, conceives the dominant quality, perceives the traces which this leaves on the others, marks the discordant or harmonious influences of temperament, of education, of occupation, and labours to manifest the invisible world of inward inclinations and dispositions by the visible world of outward words

and actions. To this is his power reduced. Whatever these things are, he takes little. A genuine painter sees with pleasure a well-shaped arm and vigorous muscles even if they be employed in knocking down a man. A genuine novelist enjoys the contemplation of the greatness of a beautiful sentiment, or the organised mechanism of a perceptive character. He has sympathy with talent because it is the only faculty which exactly copies nature: occupied in experiencing the emotions of his personages, he only dreams of marking their vigour, kind, and mutual action. He represents them to us as they are, whole, not blaming, not punishing, not mutilating them; he transfers them to us intact and separate, and leaves to us the right of judging if we desire it. His whole effort is to make them visible, to unravel the types darkened and altered by the accidents and imperfections of real life, to set in relief grand human passions, to be shaken by the greatness of the beings whom he animates, to raise us out of ourselves by the force of his creations. We recognise art in this creative power, impartial and universal as nature, freer and more potent than nature, taking up the rough-drawn or disfigured work of its rival in order to correct its faults and give effect to its conceptions.

All is changed by the intervention of satire; and more particularly, the part of the author. When in an ordinary novel he speaks in his own name, it is to explain a sentiment or mark the cause of a faculty; in a satirical novel it is to give us moral advice. It has been seen to how many lessons Thackeray subjects us. That they are good ones no one disputes; but at least they take the place of useful explanations. A third of

a volume, being occupied by warnings, is lost to art. Summoned to reflect on our faults, we know the character less. The author designedly neglects a hundred delicate shades which he might have discovered and shown to us. The character, less complete, is less lifelike; the interest, less concentrated, is less lively. Turned away from it instead of brought back to it, our eyes wander and forget it; instead of being absorbed, we are absent in mind. And, what is worse, we end by experiencing some degree of weariness. We judge these sermons true, but repeated till we are sick of them, we fancy ourselves listening to college lectures, or handbooks for the use of young priests. We find similar things in books with gilt edges and pictured covers, given as Christmas presents to children. Are we much rejoiced to learn that marriages for the sake of money or rank have their inconveniency, that in the absence of a friend we readily speak evil of him, that a son often afflicts his mother by his irregularities, that selfishness is an ugly fault? All this is true; but it is too true. We listen in order to hear new things. These old moralities, though useful and well spoken, smack of the paid pedant, so common in England, the clergyman in the white tie, standing bolt upright in his room, and droning, for three hundred a year, daily admonition to the young gentlemen whom parents have sent to his educational hothouse.

This regular presence of a moral intention spoils the novel as well as the novelist. It must be confessed, a volume of Thackeray has the cruel misfortune of recalling the novels of Miss Edgeworth or the stories of Canon Schmidt. Here is one which shows us Pendennis proud, extravagant, hair-brained, lazy, shamefully plucked

at his examination; whilst his companions, less intellectual but more studious, take high places in honours or pass with decent credit. This edifying contrast does not warn us; we do not wish to go back to school; we shut the book, and recommend it like medicine, to our little cousin. Other puerilities, less shocking, end in wearying us just as much. We do not like the prolonged contrast between good Colonel Newcome and his wicked relatives. The Colonel gives money and cakes to every child, money and shawls to all his cousins, money and kind words to all the servants; and these people only answer him with coldness and coarseness. It is clear, from the first page, that the author would persuade us to be affable, and we kick against the too matter-of-course invitation; we don't want to be scolded in a novel; we are in a bad humour with this invasion of pedagogy. We wanted to go to the theatre; we have been taken in by the outside bill, and we growl *sotto voce*, to find ourselves at a sermon.

Let us console ourselves: the characters suffer as much as we; the author spoils them in preaching to us; they, like us, are sacrificed to satire. He does not animate beings, he lets puppets act. He only combines their actions to make them ridiculous, odious, or disappointing. After a few scenes we recognise the spring, and thenceforth we are always foreseeing when it is going to act. This foresight deprives the character of half its truth, and the reader of half his illusion. Perfect fooleries, complete mischances, unmitigated wickednesses, are rare things. The events and feelings of real life are not so arranged as to make such calculated contrasts and such clever combinations. Nature does not invent these dramatic effects: we soon see

that we are before the foot-lights, in front of bedizened actors, whose words are written for them, and their gestures arranged.

To bring before our mind exactly this alteration of truth and art, we must compare two characters step by step. There is a personage, unanimously recognised as Thackeray's masterpiece, Becky Sharp, an intriguante and a bad character, but a superior and well-mannered woman. Let us compare her to a similar personage of Balzac, in *les Parents pauvres*, Valérie Marneffe. The difference of the two works will exhibit the difference of the two literatures. As the English excel as moralists and satirists, so the French excel as artists and novel-writers.

Balzac loves his Valérie; this is why he explains and magnifies her. He does not labour to make her odious, but intelligible. He gives her the education of a prostitute, a "husband as depraved as a prison full of galley-slaves," luxurious habits, recklessness, prodigality, womanly nerves, a pretty woman's dislikes, an artist's rapture. Thus born and bred, her corruption is natural. She needs elegance as she needs air. She takes it no matter whence, remorselessly as we drink water from the first stream. She is not worse than her profession; she has all its innate and acquired excuses, of mood, tradition, circumstances, necessity; she has all its powers, *abandon*, charms, mad gaiety, alternations of triviality and elegance, sudden audacity, comical devices, magnificence and success. She is perfect of her kind, like a proud and dangerous horse, which we admire while we fear it. Balzac delights to paint her only for the sake of his picture. He dresses her, lays on for her her patches, arranges her garments, trembles before her dancing-girl's motions. He details her gestures

with as much pleasure and truth as if he were her waiting-woman. His artistic curiosity is fed on the least traits of character and manners. After a violent scene, he pauses at a spare moment, and shows her idle, stretched on her couch like a cat, yawning and basking in the sun. Like a physiologist, he knows that the nerves of the beast of prey are softened, and that it only ceases to bound in order to sleep. But what bounds! She dazzles, fascinates; she defends herself successively against three proved accusations, refutes evidence, alternately humiliates and glorifies herself, rails, adores, demonstrates, changing a score of times her voice, her ideas, tricks, and all this in one quarter of an hour. An old shopkeeper, protected against emotions by trade and avarice, trembles at her speech: "She sets her feet on my heart, crushes me, stuns me. Ah, what a woman! When she looks cold at me, it is worse than a stomach-ache. . . . How she tripped down the steps, making them bright with her looks!" Everywhere passion, force, atrocity, conceal the ugliness and corruption. Attacked in her fortune by a respectable woman, Mad. Marneffe gets up an incomparable comedy, played with a great poet's eloquence and exaltation and broken suddenly by the burst of laughter and coarse triviality of a porter's daughter on the stage. Style and action are raised to the height of an epic. "When the words 'Hulot and two hundred thousand francs' were mentioned, Valérie gave a passing look from between her two long eyelids, like the glare of a cannon through its smoke." A little further, caught in the act by one of her lovers, a Brazilian, and quite capable of killing her, she blenched for an instant; but recovering the same moment, she checked her tears. "She came to him,

and looked so fiercely that her eyes glittered like daggers." Danger roused and inspired her, and her excited nerves propel genius and courage to her brain. To complete the picture of this impetuous nature, superior and unstable, Balzac at the last moment makes her repent. To proportion her fortune to her vice, he leads her triumphantly through the ruin, death, or despair of twenty people, and shatters her in the supreme moment by a fall as terrible as her success.

Before such passion and logic, what is Becky Sharp? A calculating plotter, cool in temperament, full of common sense, an ex-governess, having parsimonious habits, a genuine woman of business, always proper, always active, unsexed, void of the voluptuous softness and diabolical transport which can give brilliancy to her character and charm to her profession. She is not a prostitute, but a petticoated and heartless barrister. Nothing is more fit to inspire aversion. The author loses no opportunity of expressing his own; through two-thirds of the book he pursues her with sarcasms and misfortunes; he puts only false words, perfidious actions, revolting sentiments, in her mouth. From her coming on the stage, at the age of seventeen, treated with rare kindness by a simple-minded family, she lies from morning to night, and by coarse expedients tries to fish there for a husband. The better to crush her, Thackeray himself sets forth all this baseness, these lies, and indecencies. Rebecca ever so gently pressed the hand of fat Joseph: "It was an advance, and as such, perhaps, some ladies of indisputable correctness and gentility will condemn the action as immodest; but, you see, poor dear Rebecca had all this work to do for herself. If a person is too poor to keep a servant, though ever so elegant, he must



sweep his own rooms : if a dear girl has no dear mamma to settle matters with the young man, she must do it for herself.”<sup>1</sup> Whilst Becky was a governess at Sir Pitt Crawley’s, she gains the friendship of her pupils, by reading to them the tales of Crébillon the younger, and of Voltaire. She writes to her friend Amelia : “ The rector’s wife paid me a score of compliments about the progress my pupils made, and thought, no doubt, to touch my heart—poor, simple, country soul ! as if I cared a fig about my pupils.”<sup>2</sup> This phrase is an imprudence hardly natural in so careful a person, and the author adds it gratuitously to her part, to make it odious. A little further Rebecca is grossly adulatory and mean to old Miss Crawley ; and her pompous periods, manifestly false, instead of exciting admiration, raise disgust. She is selfish and lying to her husband, and knowing that he is on the field of battle, busies herself only in getting together a little purse. Thackeray designedly dwells on the contrast : the heavy dragoon “ went through the various items of his little catalogue of effects, striving to see how they might be turned into money for his wife’s benefit, in case any accident should befall him.” “ Faithful to his plan of economy, the captain dressed himself in his oldest and shabbiest uniform ” to get killed in :

“ And this famous dandy of Windsor and Hyde Park went off on his campaign . . . with something like a prayer on the lips for the woman he was leaving. He took her up from the ground, and held her in his arms for a minute, tight pressed against his strong beating heart. ‘ His face was purple and his eyes dim, as he put her down and left her. . . . And Rebecca, as we have said, wisely determined not to give way to unavail-

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ch. xi.

ing sentimentality on her husband's departure. . . . 'What a fright I seem,' she said, examining herself in the glass, 'and how pale this pink makes one look.' So she divested herself of this pink raiment; . . . then she put her bouquet of the ball into a glass of water, and went to bed, and slept very comfortably."<sup>1</sup>

From these examples judge of the rest. Thackeray's whole business is to degrade Rebecca Sharp. He convicts her of being harsh to her son, robbing tradesmen, deceiving everybody. And after all, he makes her a dupe; whatever she does, comes to nothing. Compromised by the advances which she has lavished on foolish Joseph, she momentarily expects an offer of marriage. A letter comes, announcing that he has gone to Scotland, and presents his compliments to Miss Rebecca. Three months later, she secretly marries Captain Rawdon, a poor dolt. Sir Pitt Crawley, Rawdon's father, throws himself at her feet, with four thousand a year, and offers her his hand. In her consternation she weeps despairingly. "Married, married, married already!" is her cry; and it is enough to pierce sensitive souls. Later, she tries to win her sister-in-law by passing for a good mother. "Why do you kiss me here?" asks her son; "you never kiss me at home." The consequence is, complete discredit; once more she is lost. The Marquis of Steyne, her lover, presents her to society, loads her with jewels, bank-notes, and has her husband appointed to some island in the East. The husband enters at the wrong moment, knocks my lord down, restores the diamonds, and drives her away. Wandering on the Continent, she tries five or six times to grow rich and appear honest. Always, at the moment of success, accident brings her to the

<sup>1</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ch. xxx.

ground. Thackeray sports with her, as a child with a cockchafer, letting her hoist herself painfully to the top of the ladder, in order to pluck her down by the foot and make her tumble disgracefully. He ends by dragging her through taverns and greenrooms, and pointing his finger at her from a distance, as a gamester, a drunkard, is unwilling to touch her further. On the last page he installs her vulgarly in a small fortune, plundered by doubtful devices, and leaves her in bad odour, uselessly hypocritical, abandoned to the shadiest society. Beneath this storm of irony and contempt, the heroine is dwarfed, illusion is weakened, interest diminished, art attenuated, poetry disappears, and the character, more useful, has become less true and beautiful.

## IX.

Suppose that a happy chance lays aside these causes of weakness, and keeps open these sources of talent. Amongst all these transformed novels appears a single genuine one, elevated, touching, simple, original, the history of Henry Esmond. Thackeray has not written a less popular nor a more beautiful story.

This book comprises the fictitious memoirs of Colonel Esmond, a contemporary of Queen Anne, who, after a troubled life in Europe, retired with his wife to Virginia, and became a planter there. Esmond speaks; and the necessity of adapting the tone to the character suppresses the satirical style, the reiterated irony, the bitter sarcasm, the scenes contrived to ridicule folly, the events combined to crush vice. Thenceforth we enter the real world; we let illusion guide us, we rejoice in a varied spectacle, easily unfolded, without

moral intention. We are no more harassed by personal advice; we remain in our place, calm, sure, no actor's finger pointed at us to warn us at an interesting moment that the piece is played on our account, and to do us good. At the same time, and unconsciously, we are at ease. Quitting bitter satire, pure narration charms us; we take rest from hating. We are like an army surgeon, who, after a day of fights and manœuvres, sits on a hillock and beholds the motion in the camp, the procession of carriages, and the distant horizon softened by the sombre tints of evening.

On the other hand, the long reflections, which seem vulgar and out of place under the pen of the writer, become natural and interesting in the mouth of the chief character in this novel. Esmond is an old man, writing for his children, and remarking upon his experience. He has a right to judge life; his maxims are suitable to his years: having passed into sketches of manners, they lose their pedantic air; we hear them complacently, and perceive, as we turn the page, the calm and sad smile which has dictated them.

With the reflections we endure the details. Elsewhere, the minute descriptions appear frequently puerile; we blamed the author for dwelling, with the preciseness of an English painter, on school adventures, coach scenes, inn episodes; we thought that this intense studiousness, unable to grasp lofty themes of art, was compelled to stoop to microscopical observations and photographic details. Here everything is changed. A writer of memoirs has a right to record his childish impressions. His distant recollections, mutilated remnants of a forgotten life, have a peculiar charm; we accompany him back to infancy. A Latin lesson, a

soldiers' march, a ride behind some one, become important events embellished by distance; we enjoy his peaceful and familiar pleasure, and feel with him a vast sweetness in seeing once more, with so much ease and in so clear a light, the well-known phantoms of the past. Minute detail adds to the interest in adding to the naturalness. Stories of campaign life, random opinions on the books and events of the time, a hundred petty scenes, a thousand petty facts, manifestly useless, are on that very account illusory. We forget the author, we listen to the old Colonel, we find ourselves carried back a hundred years, and we have the extreme pleasure, so uncommon, of believing in what we read.

Whilst the subject obviates the faults, or turns them into virtues, it offers for these virtues the very finest theme. A powerful reflection has decomposed and reproduced the manners of the time with a most astonishing fidelity. Thackeray knows Swift, Steele, Addison, St. John, Marlborough, as well as the most attentive and learned historian. He depicts their habits, household, conversation, like Walter Scott himself; and, what Walter Scott could not do, he imitates their style so that we are deceived by it; and many of their authentic phrases, inwoven with the text cannot be distinguished from it. This perfect imitation is not limited to a few select scenes, but pervades the whole volume. Colonel Esmond writes as people wrote in the year 1700. The feat, I was going to say the genius, is as great as the attempt of Paul Louis Courier, in imitating successfully the style of ancient Greece. The style of Esmond has the calmness, the exactness, the simplicity, the solidity of the classics. Our

modern temerities, our prodigal imagery, our jostled figures, our habit of gesticulation, our striving for effect, all our bad literary customs have disappeared. Thackeray must have gone back to the primitive sense of words, discovered their forgotten shades of meaning, recomposed an obliterated state of intellect and a lost species of ideas, to make his copy approach so closely to the original. The imagination of Dickens himself would have failed in this. To attempt and accomplish this, needed all the sagacity, calmness, and power of knowledge and meditation.

But the masterpiece of the work is the character of Esmond. Thackeray has endowed him with that tender kindness, almost feminine, which he everywhere extols above all other human virtues, and that self-mastery which is the effect of habitual reflection. These are the finest qualities of his psychological armoury; each by its contrast increases the value of the other. We see a hero, but original and new, English in his cool resolution, modern by the delicacy and sensibility of his heart.

Henry Esmond is a poor child, the supposed bastard of Lord Castlewood, brought up by his heirs. In the opening chapter we are touched by the modulated and noble emotion which we retain to the end of the work. Lady Castlewood, on her first visit to the castle, comes to him in the "book-room or yellow gallery;" being informed by the house-keeper who the little boy is, she blushes and walks back; the next instant, touched by remorse, she returns:

"With a look of infinite pity and tenderness in her eyes, she took his hand again, placing her other fair hand on his head, and saying some words to him, which were so kind, and said in

a voice so sweet, that the boy, who had never looked upon so much beauty before, felt as if the touch of a superior being or angel smote him down to the ground, and kissed the fair protecting hand as he knelt on one knee. To the very last hour of his life, Esmond remembered the lady as she then spoke and looked, the rings on her fair hands, the very scent of her robe, the beam of her eyes lighting up with surprise and kindness, her lips blooming in a smile, the sun making a golden halo round her hair.<sup>1</sup> . . . There seemed, as the boy thought, in every look or gesture of this fair creature, an angelical softness and bright pity—in motion or repose she seemed gracious alike; the tone of her voice, though she uttered words ever so trivial, gave him a pleasure that amounted almost to anguish. It cannot be called love, that a lad of twelve years of age, little more than a menial, felt for an exalted lady, his mistress; but it was worship."<sup>2</sup>

This noble and pure feeling is expanded by a series of devoted actions, related with extreme simplicity; in the least words, in the turn of a phrase, in a chance conversation, we perceive a great heart, passionately grateful, never tiring of doing a kindness, or a service, sympathising, friendly, giving advice, defending the honour of the family and the fortune of the children. Twice Esmond interposed between Lord Castlewood and Mohun the duellist; it was not his fault that the murderer's weapon did not reach his own breast. When Lord Castlewood on his deathbed revealed that Esmond was not a bastard, but that the title and fortune of Castlewood were lawfully his, the young man, without a word, burned the confession which would have rescued him from the poverty and humiliation in which he had so long pined. Insulted by the Lady Castle-

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Henry Esmond*, bk. i. ch. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* bk. i. ch. vii.

wood, sick of a wound received by his kinsman's side, accused of ingratitude and cowardice, he persisted in his silence with the justification in his hand: "And when the struggle was over in Harry's mind, a glow of righteous happiness filled it; and it was with grateful tears in his eyes that he returned thanks to God for that decision which he had been enabled to make."<sup>1</sup> Later, being in love, but sure not to marry if his birth remained under a cloud in the eyes of the world, having repaid his benefactress, whose son he had saved, entreated by her to resume the name which belonged to him, he smiled sweetly, and gravely replied:

"'It was settled twelve years since, by my dear lord's bedside,' says Colonel Esmond. 'The children must know nothing of this. Frank and his heirs after him must bear our name. 'Tis his rightfully; I have not even a proof of that marriage of my father and mother, though my poor lord, on his deathbed, told me that Father Holt had brought such a proof to Castlewood. I would not seek it when I was abroad. I went and looked at my poor mother's grave in her convent. What matter to her now? No court of law on earth, upon my mere word, would deprive my Lord Viscount and set me up. I am the head of the house, dear lady; but Frank is Viscount of Castlewood still. And rather than disturb him, I would turn monk, or disappear in America.'

"As he spoke so to his dearest mistress, for whom he would have been willing to give up his life, or to make any sacrifice any day, the fond creature flung herself down on her knees before him, and kissed both his hands in an outbreak of passionate love and gratitude, such as could not but melt his heart, and make him feel very proud and thankful that God had given him the power to show his love for her, and to prove it by some little sacrifice on his own part. To be able to bestow benefits

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Henry Esmond*, bk. ii. ch. i.



or happiness on those one loves is sure the greatest blessing conferred upon a man—and what wealth or name, or gratification of ambition or vanity, could compare with the pleasure Esmond now had of being able to confer some kindness upon his best and dearest friends!

“ ‘Dearest saint,’ says he, ‘purest soul, that has had so much to suffer, that has blest the poor lonely orphan with such a treasure of love. ’Tis for me to kneel, not for you: ’tis for me to be thankful that I can make you happy. Hath my life any other aim? Blessed be God that I can serve you!’ ”<sup>1</sup>

This noble tenderness seems still more touching when contrasted with the surrounding circumstances. Esmond goes to the wars, serves a political party, lives amidst dangers and bustle, judging revolutions and politics from a lofty point of view; he becomes a man of experience, well informed, learned, farsighted, capable of great enterprises, possessing prudence and courage, harassed by his own thoughts and griefs, ever sad and ever strong. He ends by accompanying to England the Pretender, half-brother of Queen Anne, and keeps him disguised at Castlewood, awaiting the moment when the queen, dying and won over to the Tory cause, should declare him her heir. This young prince, a true Stuart, pays court to Lord Castlewood’s daughter Beatrix, whom Esmond loves, and gets out at night to join her. Esmond, who waits for him, sees the crown lost and his house dishonoured. His insulted honour and outraged love break forth in a proud and terrible rage. Pale, with set teeth, his brain on fire by four sleepless nights of anxiety, he keeps his mind clear, and his voice calm; he explains to the prince with perfect etiquette,

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Henry Esmond*, bk. iii. ch. ii.

and with the respectful coldness of an official messenger, the folly which the prince has committed, and the villany which the prince contemplated. The scene must be read to see how much superiority and passion this calmness and bitterness imply :

“ ‘What mean you, my lord ?’ says the Prince, and muttered something about a *guet-à-pens*, which Esmond caught up.

“ ‘The snare, Sir,’ said he, ‘was not of our laying ; it is not we that invited you. We came to avenge, and not to compass, the dishonour of our family.’

“ ‘Dishonour ! *Morbleu* ! there has been no dishonour,’ says the Prince, turning scarlet, ‘only a little harmless playing.’

“ ‘That was meant to end seriously.’

“ ‘I swear,’ the Prince broke out impetuously, ‘upon the honour of a gentleman, my lords’—

“ ‘That we arrived in time. No wrong hath been done, Frank,’ says Colonel Esmond, turning round to young Castlewood, who stood at the door as the talk was going on. ‘See ! here is a paper whereon his Majesty hath deigned to commence some verses in honour, or dishonour, of Beatrix. Here is, “Madame” and “Flamme,” “Cruelle” and “Rebelle,” and “Amour” and “Jour,” in the Royal writing and spelling. Had the Gracious lover been happy, he had not passed his time in sighing.’ In fact, and actually as he was speaking, Esmond cast his eyes down towards the table, and saw a paper on which my young Prince had been scrawling a madrigal, that was to finish his charmer on the morrow.

“ ‘Sir,’ says the Prince, burning with rage (he had assumed his Royal coat unassisted by this time), ‘did I come here to receive insults ?’

“ ‘To confer them, may it please your Majesty,’ says the Colonel, with a very low bow, ‘and the gentlemen of our family are come to thank you.’

“ ‘*Malediction* !’ says the the young man, tears starting into

his eyes with helpless rage and mortification. 'What will you with me, gentlemen!'

" 'If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment,' says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, 'I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you, and by your permission I will lead the way;' and taking the taper up, and backing before the Prince with very great ceremony, Mr. Esmond passed into the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered into the house:—'Please to set a chair for his Majesty, Frank,' says the Colonel to his companion, who wondered almost as much at this scene, and was as much puzzled by it, as the other actor in it. Then going to the crypt over the mantel-piece, the Colonel opened it, and drew thence the papers which so long had lain there.

" 'Here, may it please your Majesty,' says he, 'is the Patent of Marquis sent over by your Royal Father at St. Germain's to Viscount Castlewood, my father: here is the witnessed certificate of my father's marriage to my mother, and of my birth and christening; I was christened of that religion of which your sainted sire gave all through life so shining example. These are my titles, dear Frank, and this what I do with them: here go Baptism and Marriage, and here the Marquisate and the August Sign-Manual, with which your predecessor was pleased to honour our race.' And as Esmond spoke he set the papers burning in the brazier. 'You will please, sir, to remember,' he continued, 'that our family hath ruined itself by fidelity to yours; that my grandfather spent his estate, and gave his blood and his son to die for your service; that my dear lord's grandfather (for lord you are now, Frank, by right and title too) died for the same cause; that my poor kinswoman, my father's second wife, after giving away her honour to your wicked perjured race, sent all her wealth to the King, and got in return that precious title that lies in ashes, and this inestimable yard of blue riband. I lay this at your feet, and stamp upon it: I draw this sword, and break it and deny you; and had you completed the wrong

you designed us, by Heaven I would have driven it through your heart, and no more pardoned you than your father pardoned Monmouth.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Two pages later he speaks thus of his marriage to Lady Castlewood :

“ That happiness which hath subsequently crowned it, cannot be written in words ; 'tis of its nature sacred and secret, and not to be spoken of, though the heart be ever so full of thankfulness, save to Heaven and the One ear alone—to one fond being, the truest and tenderest and purest wife ever man was blessed with. As I think of the immense happiness which was in store for me, and of the depth and intensity of that love which, for so many years, hath blessed me, I own to a transport of wonder and gratitude for such a boon—nay, am thankful to have been endowed with a heart capable of feeling and knowing the immense beauty and value of the gift which God hath bestowed upon me. Sure, love *vincit omnia*, is immeasurably above all ambition, more precious than wealth, more noble than name. He knows not life who knows not that : he hath not felt the highest faculty of the soul who hath not enjoyed it. In the name of my wife I write the completion of hope, and the summit of happiness. To have such a love is the one blessing, in comparison of which all earthly joy is of no value ; and to think of her, is to praise God.”

A character capable of such contrasts is a lofty work ; it is to be remembered that Thackeray has produced no other ; we regret that moral intentions have perverted these fine literary faculties ; and we deplore that satire has robbed art of such talent.

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Henry Esmond*, bk. iii. ch. xiii.

## X.

Who is he ; and what is the value of this literature of which he is one of the princes ? At bottom, like every literature, it is a definition of man ; and to judge it, we must compare it with man. We can do so now ; we have just studied a mind, Thackeray himself ; we have considered his faculties, their connections, results, their different degrees ; we have before our eyes a model of human nature. We have a right to judge of the copy by the model, and to control the definition which his novels lay down by the definition which his character furnishes.

The two definitions are contrary, and his portrait is a criticism on his talent. We have seen that in him the same faculties produce the beautiful and the ugly, force and weakness, success and failure ; that moral reflection, after having provided him with every satirical power, debases him in art ; that, after having spread over his contemporary novels a tone of vulgarity and falseness, it raises his historical novel to the level of the finest productions ; that the same constitution of mind teaches him the sarcastic and violent, as well as the modulated and simple style, the bitterness and harshness of hate with the effusion and delicacy of love. The evil and the good, the beautiful and the ugly, the repulsive and the agreeable, are in him then but remoter effects, of slight importance, born of changing circumstances, acquired and fortuitous qualities, not essential and primitive, different forms which different streams present in the same current. So it is with other men. Doubtless moral qualities are of the first rank ; they are the motive power of civilisation, and constitute the

nobleness of the individual; society exists by them alone, and by them alone man is great. But if they are the finest fruit of the human plant, they are not its root; they give us our value, but do not constitute our elements. Neither the vices nor the virtues of man are his nature; to praise or to blame him is not to know him; approbation or disapprobation does not define him; the names of good or bad tell us nothing of what he is. Put the robber Cartouche in an Italian court of the fifteenth century; he would be a great statesman. Transport this nobleman, stingy and narrow-minded, into a shop; he will be an exemplary tradesman. This public man, of inflexible probity, is in his drawing-room an intolerable coxcomb. This father of a family, so humane, is an idiotic politician. Change a virtue in its circumstances, and it becomes a vice; change a vice in its circumstances, and it becomes a virtue. Regard the same quality from two sides; on one it is a fault, on the other a merit. The essential man is found concealed far below these moral badges; they only point out the useful or noxious effect of our inner constitution: they do not reveal our inner constitution. They are safety or advertising lights attached to our names, to warn the passer-by to avoid or approach us; they are not the explanatory chart of our being. Our true essence consists in the causes of our good or bad qualities, and these causes are discovered in the temperament, the species and degree of imagination, the amount and velocity of attention, the magnitude and direction of primitive passions. A character is a force, like gravity, or steam, capable, as it may happen, of pernicious or profitable effects, and which must be defined otherwise than by the amount of the

weight it can lift or the havoc it can cause. It is therefore to ignore man, to reduce him, as Thackeray and English literature generally do, to an aggregate of virtues and vices; it is to lose sight in him of all but the exterior and social side; it is to neglect the inner and natural element. We will find the same fault in English criticism, always moral, never psychological, bent on exactly measuring the degree of human honesty, ignorant of the mechanism of our sentiments and faculties; we will find the same fault in English religion, which is but an emotion or a discipline; in their philosophy, destitute of metaphysics; and if we ascend to the source, according to the rule which derives vices from virtues, and virtues from vices, we will see all these weaknesses derived from their native energy, their practical education, and that kind of severe and religious poetic instinct which has in time past made them Protestant and Puritan.







204  
H-6











